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SENTINELS OF THE WILD



*A hideous snarl shook the dawn air as
Chui clung to the brink*

[See page 114]

SENTINELS OF THE WILD

BY

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*Graphic studies of
the wild creatures
in their struggle
for existence*

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Contents

	<i>PAGE</i>
THE LANDMARK	11
THE PRISONER	21
THE COMPASS	31
THE BAIT	41
THE BLACK WOLF OF THE SILVERTRAIL	50
ON THE EAVES OF THE WHITE WORLD	62
TEMBO AND THE CAMERA MAN	72
IRON-HOOF, THE VENGEFUL	82
IN THE WAKE OF THE FIRE FIEND	90
CHUI—THE MONKEY-KILLER	103
WALLAH-UMPH'S TIGER	116



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List of Illustrations

	<i>Page</i>
A hideous snarl shook the dawn air as Chui clung to the brink . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
They met with a thud, fully three feet from the earth	13
The white rabbit became a familiar feature of that landscape	16
The dog badger had the last of them stowed deep among the rocks over the hilltop	24
The she badger was half-way through, the rail pressing deeply into her body .	29
The young hind stood dejectedly over Monarch, sniffing sadly	32
Monarch broke away, breasting the slope	37
The vixen was watching him from somewhere up the mountain face	42
The vixen laid down her load and uttered two short yaps	48
The black wolf of the Silvertrail	53
The two great hounds, skilled in fighting together, bore Starlight down . .	60
Safaid and his mate were watching	65
There was something accusing in that crouching death	69
Old Tembo, immense in the moonlight . . . his trunk flung upwards	73
The great trunk encircled Basil's body and he was raised high into the air .	77
There was a crash of tusks and a thud of mighty bodies	78
Twenty yards or so behind Iron-Hoof was his little herd	83
The lioness was steadily gliding up to Iron-Hoof, inch by inch	87
The living horror of the pools	92
Simba alighted on the shoulders of Old Leather Back	95
Old Kiboko cared nothing for the world without	97
The lions were all round and all over Kiboko	100
Chui crept, a shadow among the shadows	104
Chui and Ma-Hoo lay in the soft light, at peace with the world	107
In a moment the baboons were all over Chui	111
Ma-Hoo watched the fate of Chui	114
Bagh, the tigress, froze in her tracks	117
The tigress came round a boulder of rock on top of him	121

The Landmark

Though black wild rabbits are numerous, how rarely one sees white wild one! Yet as many white wild rabbits are born as black ones, but because of their unenviable distinction, they do not live to attain maturity. This is a story of a white rabbit which not only lived, but which rose to the highest distinction which a wild beast can attain.

BLANCHA was born in a shallow "stop" at the foot of a great shale washout between the hardwood forest and the sandhills pasture. He was one of a family of nine, and, as his name implies, he possessed a great, if not a specially enviable, distinction. His brothers and sisters were ordinary common or garden rabbit-coloured rabbits; he was pure white, without spot or blemish, as white as the sorrel bells which carpeted the adjacent wood.

The little shallow hole or "stop" which the mother had prepared for her family was only six feet or so in length, and so small that a boy could not have squeezed his hand into it. There the young rabbits remained during their blind and helpless infancy, their mother visiting them every hour or two, and on leaving them she would cover the mouth of the hole with sand. The bed on which the little ones lay was composed of soft down from her own body, intermingled with dry grass, and ere long these materials became mixed with the sand at the burrow mouth, so that the intelligent eye might have discovered her secret in spite of her pains. But the ruse served to hide the body scent of her young, thus shielding them from perhaps the deadliest of their foes—the burrow-hunting stoats and weasels.

As soon as the young obtained their sight and their hearing, and began to evince a desire to move about, their mother led them one chilly night to the great burrow in the sandhills pasture, and it was there that they first began to live their lives on their own account. There Blancha first learnt what it meant to be a white rabbit.

Had he been deaf and lame his lot in life could not have been less enviable, and, singled out among his fellows, we shall see how he developed accordingly, ever the most alert, ever ready to act. That was *why* he lived, and had he not acquired abnormal faculties to meet the abnormal circumstances of his life, this story would not have been written. We must in all justice regard him as one outstandingly wise in a race not remarkable for its wisdom, for he lived and flourished, in spite of his distinction, while others not so handicapped simply passed out of existence.

Many mother rabbits had brought their youngsters down from their respective places of secrecy to the sandy burrow by the burn, so that already it was crowded with little rabbits and nursing mothers. How many of them that one burrow contained I scarcely dare to speculate. Fifty or so could be seen almost any hour of the day dotting the greensward, and it is safe to assume that there were at least as many underground as above. There they would squat and pursue each other, nibbling the closely cropped grass, and, with one exception, they were as much alike as so many peas, save in point of size. The exception caught the eye from fully a mile away, and never failed to command a second glance. That was Blanca.

On the very first day the little white rabbit appeared on the greensward above, the three buzzards which regularly hunted lizards and mice along the upper slope came gliding slowly by, stately as ships at sea, flashing silver and gold among the fleecy clouds. Normally they paid no heed to the rabbit swarms, but to-day, one of them glided out over the valley and proceeded to soar immediately above the warren. For perhaps ten minutes he kept it up, hanging idly in the wind, as though he could not make out what Blanca was, and when everyone had become used to him, he suddenly stood still in the air, and elevating his wings till their tips pointed skywards, he came down, giddily down, American escalator fashion.

Although a motionless object in the sky is ever an object of distrust among the wild folk, few of them seem able to judge the distance of things overhead. So when the great hawk descended as it did, the young rabbits never realized that it was drawing nearer, till, indeed, it was almost in their midst.



They met with a thud, fully three feet from the earth

Suddenly a mother rabbit dealt the earth a resounding thump, and at the same instant there was an ominous hiss of pinions overhead. Little Blancha flattened where he was, and next moment, when he saw those wicked talons extended to clutch him, when he saw the fierce, gleaming eyes of the bird of prey glaring down upon him, he uttered a plaintive squeal of terror, for instinctively he felt himself to be doomed.

It was Blancha's mother who had thumped the earth, and now, with ears erect, looking fully the size of a hare, she came bounding up to his rescue.

So, as the buzzard descended, Blancha's mother leapt to meet

him. They met with a thud, fully three feet from the earth, and simultaneously the fluff and the feathers flew. The great bird screamed, staggered, and struck the earth ten feet away, where he sat on his tail, gaping with anger and surprise. Blanca's mother dived to the nearest hole, and the little white rabbit, roused from his nightmare, scuttled after her into safety.

But it was the first and the last time that Blanca's mother ever fought a battle for him. Thereafter he was left entirely to defend himself, for his mother had acquired new interests, and having nursed her young and safely conveyed them to the sandhills burrow, she evidently thought that her maternal duties ended. Perhaps she lost sight of her children among the many, but I rather think that she lost interest, for she could not very well have lost sight of Blanca. No one could have lost sight of Blanca, but ere she went she had taught him this priceless lesson—never to wait for the thump danger-signal to be given a second time. A brown rabbit might wait a hundred times and live, but not a white one.

Thus fear came into Blanca's life among the first of his impressions, and thereafter it was his daily companion. I believe, however, that fear had not the same meaning to him that it has to other beasts. He became so used to being the sport of all, that he would emerge from the most paralysing escape indifferently, to scratch his ear immediately it was over, and this blaséness was unquestionably one reason for his extraordinary survival. Other rabbits might crouch before their foes, paralysed with terror, but not Blanca. In this he partook of the ways of the hare, which knows no sanctuary.

The white rabbit became a familiar feature of that landscape, and more than one of us came to know him. From river-keeper, forester, and rabbit-catcher, together with what I myself saw, I pieced together his story bit by bit. Creatures which his fellow-colonists had no reason to fear, were his foes at all times. The sparrow-hawk, which had its eyrie among the soft emerald shoots of the fir-tree at the forest foot, was a bird of regular habits, and just after noon each day she would fly over the sandhills from hawking the river bank for voles. One day, seeing that unusual white blob among the other young rabbits, she stooped and struck

at Blanca, partly out of curiosity, perhaps, and Blanca dodged underground just in the ace of time.

Thereafter the hawk struck at him whenever she saw him, and missing him time after time, she began to bear him a special grudge. She would sit on the tipmost top of that emerald tower of hers, waiting in the dazzling light till Blanca was some little distance from the nearest hole—never very far—then out she would dive.

Swift and inexorable she was, and generally it was a thrilling race to the nearest burrow; but Blanca's fellow-colonist helped him watch, and at the first warning thump he was up and away. Just in time he would gain the earth, while the hawk pounded up the dust at Blanca's tail; yet two minutes later he was out again, as indifferent as his playmates, who had no need to fear the hawk.

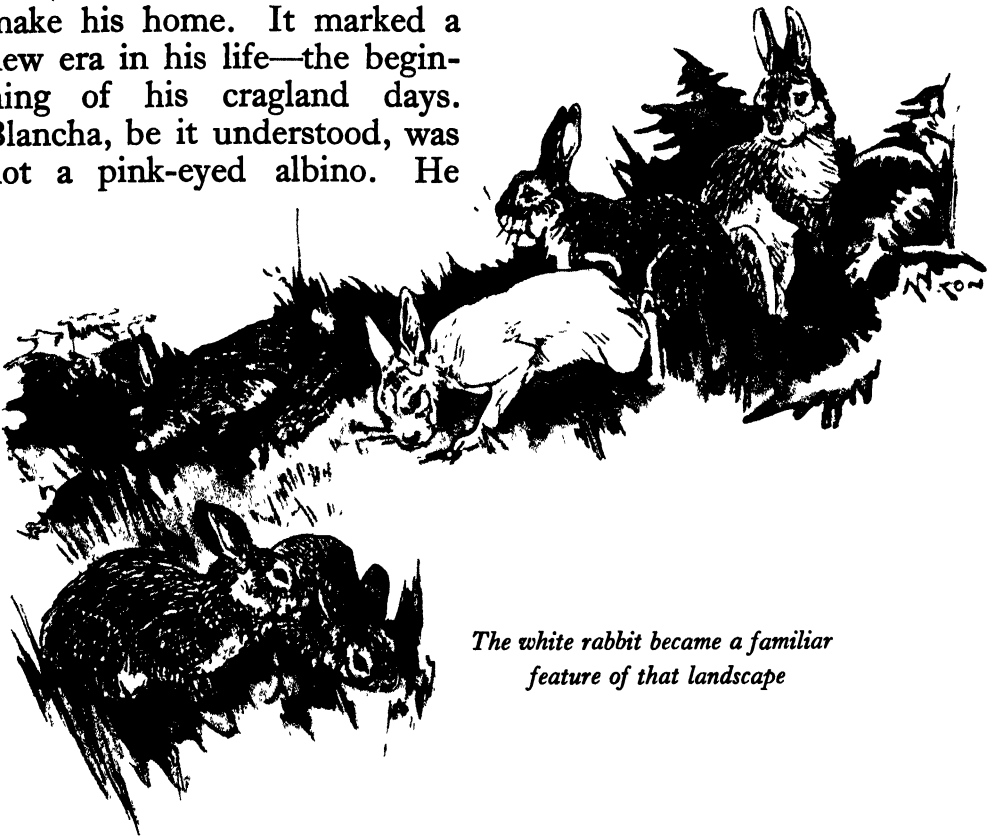
At night-time it was much the same thing. As dusk settled, the rabbit colony would flood out across the sandy pasture—at first keeping to their recognized runways, but ultimately dispersing themselves over the entire countryside. Thus the full moon might find some of them two or three miles away, and many of these bold spirits fell to snares set in the village gardens, or to the rabbit-catcher's net across the gap. But to Blanca the net and the snare constituted no peril, because he was quick to learn that the ways of his fellow-colonists were not to be his ways. He never ventured far into the open. Following the sandy bank of the burn with its numerous shallow holes, he would make his way in the golden dusk to the old wall which bounded one side of the pasture. This in turn led him to a pile of crumbling ruins, where sweet herbs grew, and where massive slabs of masonry, leaning at all angles, afforded shelter from the owls he had such good reason to dread. Scarcely a night passed but that one or more of them struck at him, while several times a vixen, nursing her cubs in the shale washout, cunningly marked him down.

So Blanca came to know every cranny and hidey-hole, as no other rabbit in all the range knew them, and always he kept in mind the exact whereabouts of the nearest haven. Other rabbits might squeal and run in undecided circles, but not Blanca. Straight and true he always ran, and so he lived. And from the ruin there was a priceless drain, leading out into the centre of the next pasture,

and Blanca made free use of this, snatching many a hearty meal from the greensward far out in the open without taking a single risk.

One rainy night the white rabbit made his way to the hardwood forest on the edge of which he was born, and here he found a new world awaiting him, and one very much to his liking. It was a wonderful wood, rich in those gifts which man-made gardens cannot know, for it was a thousand gardens in one. Great fern-draped boulders, overhung with briar and ivy, forming an endless labyrinth of chambers and corridors among the friendly shadows of the trees. A mountain torrent, by which Blanca had so far lived, tumbled down the centre of the wood in a series of sparkling falls, filling the air with scented spray, and on either bank the green things grew as in a tropical forest.

Blanca found for himself a comfortable chamber under a great rock, and here he decided to make his home. It marked a new era in his life—the beginning of his cragland days. Blanca, be it understood, was not a pink-eyed albino. He



*The white rabbit became a familiar
feature of that landscape*

was merely a colour freak, harking back, no doubt, to an imported strain, for all over the country we find such colour freaks among the rabbits, the result of local stocking at some time from the tame species.

Whether it was Blancha's ultra-keen senses which warned him to abandon the sandy burrow that night of downpour I do not know, but the fact remains that once again he escaped destruction by the narrowest margin. Truly Blancha was born under a lucky star, for at dawn, when he lay dry and warm in his newly found cranny high up in the wood, the burn rose and rose till the water poured into the bank burrows. His friends and playmates? Most of them perished, I fear, for, finding their retreat cut off, the paralysis of fear fell upon them, and they huddled at the burrow ends, to die together. When the waters receded at sundown not a single one of Blancha's friends emerged from the burrow which had so long sheltered him and them, and for many succeeding days dead rabbits were stranded all along the river banks from this and other burrows.

Some humans—few, mercifully—are moulded by the vices of their foes. Few, I say. Others follow their own desires and inclinations to whatever success and happiness be their lot. Blancha was moulded entirely by those who held his destiny as common property, and by degrees he came still more to understand that security lay remote from his own kind. Here in the sheltered valley where woodcock flew, partridges called at sundown, frogs croaked, and mice rustled everywhere—here where every thicket and hollow was filled with peeping, budding life, where the hunters moved in the half light, he, the landmark, was ill-placed. Thus, alone in looks, he became more and more solitary in character. The giddy whirl of the rabbit settlements was clearly not for him. Other rabbits might make their lives and their pleasures there, but for him a different mould was cast. Apart in looks, he needs must be apart in ways. So, by degrees, Blancha made his way higher and higher up the mountain face. The lovely hardwood forest he left behind, the shadowy blue of the pines eventually dwindled in his wake, and higher than the bracken grows he made his home. Above him there remained only the heather and the hinterland.

That August Blancha was living the life of a mountain hare.

He kept to the deep heather, moving hither and thither among its dense and twisted stems, seeking at daytime the great landslides where millions of tons of boulders lay piled, boulder upon boulder. Here the sparrow-hawk and the owls no longer troubled him much, but the foxes were ever an unholy terror, so to escape them he made his way higher still.

In the realms of the ptarmigan now, in the lands of driving mists, of savage storms, and fairy, fantastic lights, where now and then a rift in the heavens revealed the land of his birth spread out like a draught-board far below, Blanca, with the coming of winter, made his home. It was a good land for him, but mercilessly lean and sparse. He had no foes here, save the eagles and the peregrines. The eagles were rare, and, at any rate, they were easy to escape for a creature who knew so well the art of taking cover. The peregrines, to be sure, were immeasurably swift, but they preferred feather to fur, and beyond keeping a weather eye upon them, Blanca heeded them little.

Though September was not yet out, each night at that altitude saw its bitter frost, but this troubled Blanca little. It was the ever-increasing damp which proved his worst enemy. There was no hiding from it up there among the driving fogbanks; but his white coat, always heavy, became heavier still. He acquired shoes of deep, strong fur, which served not only to protect his feet on the glassy surfaces, but which prevented him from sinking into the drifts. And now at last, Blanca's white coat was a priceless gift, for none could see him against those eternal snows.

There were hares in that region—white hares, and many of them. Even the grouse were white—the ptarmigan—and truly was it a land of ghosts. But the hares were Blanca's friends, for they possessed black ear-tips, as though Dame Nature had rued her generosity at the last moment. They had black ear-tips, I say, but Blanca was pure white; and so the foxes which prowled and the eagles which soared looked not for white hares on the eternal whiteness, but for black ear-tips, and they saw not Blanca.

Down in the valley, the rabbit-catchers were at work with deadly skill and intentness of purpose. It was their job not just to kill off the surplus, but to kill every rabbit in the land, and the bulging

sacks of stiffened corpses which went out every day with the milk bore adequate testimony to their prowess. By the time December came, indeed, there was scarcely a rabbit to be seen over the faded levels where last spring they had swarmed. At dusk not a single bobbing white semaphore fled through the woods, yet Blanca lived, while those whom once he had good reason to envy went out in shiploads.

One of the mysteries of Nature is how the wild rabbit holds its own. Anything that can hold a rabbit can kill it; guns, traps, snares, nets are ever at work to lessen their numbers, while during a green winter those which perish by the flood waters and by damp far exceed in numbers the tens of thousands which go to our markets. Yet Brer Rabbit not only holds his own, but if given any chance at all, he would come to possess the earth.

That was a green winter—yes, the worst kind of winter that the wild folk know. Only the upper realms felt the touch of the Frost King, and again we wondered, as we had often wondered before, whence would come the teeming rabbit hordes which next spring we knew would occupy every sandy bank.

So spring came by the calendar, if not in fact, and one day, ere the crested lawpwings had returned, a white rabbit was seen to emerge slowly from the hardwood forest towards the sandhills pasture. He was lank and lean of limb, and one's heart went out to the little warhorse who, in spite of all, possessed now another great distinction, for he, the cursed, was *still alive*.

The spring was calling, and down through the heather line where the red grouse crowed, down through the bracken slopes, through the pine forests and the white poplar swamps, where the blackcock scraped and bowed in all the painted glory of his springtime robes, down through the hardwood forests, and across the great shale washout, Blanca had come. He, the solitary, was tired at last of his solitude, and following the old familiar sandbank, then the rubble wall of his cubhood days, he gained the ancient ruins, and searched every nook and hollow for a mate. He found her at length, not among those artistic remnants of the dark prosaic days, not among the leafless alder wands, nor in the bed of faded hollyhocks, but he found her in that blessed drain which many a time had led him to

forbidden pasture lands! At dusk Blancha was back again, and he took his lady with him, but how he got her there need not be discussed, for I do not believe that she wanted to go to that high, cold land, when here in the valley was food and shelter of the kind she knew. But, thanks to hard digging and the tough-stemmed Alpine plants, Blancha's claws and his chisel teeth were a great deal more highly developed than his sense of chivalry, and he had come down that night to *get a wife*. So, triumphant as before, he got her.

Among the blue shimmer of peaks above the sandhills pasture, above that wood which is like a thousand gardens, there dwells to-day a strange cragland race, which would seem to fall midway between the lowland rabbits and the Alpine hares. Lank and big-eared and wide-footed, they are many of them as white as snow, and all, or almost all, bear their distinctive markings. To the few who know of their existence, they are known as the rock hares of Ben—never mind the name of the mountain! Stronger and stronger that race becomes, and some day, no doubt, a learned naturalist will chance their way, and trace, by long and learned paths, their ancient pedigree to the Glacier Age.

So Blancha not only survived, but he rose to an eminence which is higher than the stars among his humble kind. He established a new kingdom, a new race so well able to hold its own that some day it may spread from range to range throughout our land.

The Prisoner

THE male badger was not at home when the diggers arrived at the newly made earth which contained the badger cubs, but their mother was with them, and immediately she heard the tread of the men above, she closed the short shaft which contained the cubs—filled up the mouth of it with loose earth, just where it joined the main burrow, ten feet in. Then she retreated to the end of the main burrow, back against the wall, and at this point was the circular chamber lined with grass and bracken in which the cubs—three of them—were actually born. It was not till they were ten days old that the mother moved them into the side pocket, for by then their whimperings were loud enough to be heard by the world without, and her natural promptings to hide them led her to act as she did.

So when the terrier entered the hole he found the she badger at the end of it, but that terrier knew his work too well to close with her. Instead, he remained at a respectful distance, yapping and snarling, and the men, listening at the mouth above, knew from the way he threw his tongue, just what was happening. They knew that their dog had the old badger at the end of the earth, and so they began to dig.

No sooner did the mother badger hear the spades at work, however, than she too began to dig—to extend the passage away from the men, knowing full well that she could dig as fast as they could. But she had counted without the terrier, for though he had wisely hung back when her striped face was towards him, he closed immediately she turned her back to apply her forepaws to the earth wall.

So for five minutes or more things were pretty evenly balanced, for there in the suffocating darkness the terrier could only occasionally force his way in against the fusillade of flying stones and sand the badger hurled between her braced hind legs. He would

dash in and slash at her ham-strings, then, quick as light, she would turn and charge him, and the charge of a badger underground is like the strike of a rattlesnake—short but swift. So the terrier would back for his life, and she would return to her digging, but he was sorely hampering her progress, which was his job; and meantime everything was in favour of the men. The ground was firm, but soft to the spade, though it did not crumble in about them. Foot by foot they were gaining, and when at length the first terrier came out for a breath of air, his eyes and mouth full of sand, the men caught him ere he could dive back, and a fresh terrier, even keener than the first, was sent down to carry on the job. Meantime the diggers themselves were keeping fresh by taking shifts at the spade, and when the second terrier was tired, yet a third was introduced, and when he came out, the first had drunk and rested, and was ready again. So the mother badger had to fight them all, men and dogs, and though her pluck and endurance never wavered, she knew that she was losing ground.

The men dug past the pocket where the cubs were hidden, but they did not see it because it was filled with sand as the mother had left it, and duly they came to the big main nest, lined with grass and bracken. "No cubs!" they cried in surprise. "She must have shifted them last night. It's the old dog badger we're digging after!"

One of the men had crept down on all fours into the earthworks, and now he announced that the badger was only a few feet away. He could hear it scratching, or "howking," as he said, and thrusting an electric flash lamp into the newly made passageway, he could actually see the flying sand the desperate creature flung behind her.

"He's right here!" the man shouted. "Give me a spade to close the earth."

A spade was handed down and jammed into position behind the digging badger, thus completely blocking the narrow corridor. Thereafter she could dig but little farther, for with the passageway blocked behind her she could not dispose of the earth she loosened, and was merely digging herself in, till she was jammed tight in the tomb of her own making.

Thus the sportsmen knew that they had her, and settled down for a smoke and a bottle of beer apiece prior to the grand finale of tailing and bagging their quarry. Poor sport, one may think, yet they were good sportsmen, who loved their dogs and respected Brock. They were not out to kill. They were out to take their badgers alive, and such as they caught would be sent to distant places where no man's hand would be raised against them. They were out to save the badgers from the Hunt.

An hour later the she badger was a captive, then the men set to work to fill in the excavations, little thinking that the cubs were still down there, and that they were burying them alive. It was close upon dark when they left the place, and forthwith the she badger was liberated in one of the keeper's kennels. The walls were of massive stonework—for it had once been a barn—the floor of concrete, and the open run was surrounded by an iron paling, strong enough to stop a lion, and seven feet in height. To make it doubly safe for such prisoners as this, the keeper had roofed over the enclosure with small mesh netting, which covered the palings also, so that one would have thought no creature, squirrel or tiger, would have stood much chance of escaping from that stronghold. The kennel was dark and cool, and there, with abundant straw, a bowl of water and a freshly killed rabbit at her disposal, the captive badger was not so badly off, in view of the primary fact that she was in men's hands.

When darkness crept down into the quiet little valley, where the badgers lived, and where the silver birches, dotting the green slopes, were stunted and crippled like old men, the dog badger returned by his own secretive ways. Full of dread and suspicion, for the scent of man was everywhere, he went up to the broken earth on the hillside, finding only a tumbled mound of sand. His home had been broken into and destroyed, his cubs and his mate were no doubt dead, yet with the dogged persistence of his kind, he set to work to find them, to dig down through the debris to the place where last he had seen them. He dug with frenzied haste, showering barrow loads of gravel down among the sorrel, and so by the time the moon was up, he got down to his cubs. They were more than half dead, for the air had all but given out in the shallow pocket,



The dog badger had the last of them stowed deep among the rocks over the hilltop

and straightaway he set to work to move them elsewhere. He did not appear to hurry—a badger never does—yet he never wasted a moment, and carrying each in turn, he had the last of them, within an hour, stowed deep down among the rocks over the hilltop, half a mile away. As he left each cub he buried it with leaves and moss, and there, where no digger could get at them, thirty feet down among the broken scree, he left them.

He left them and went to look for his mate, though what guided him I do not know. Scent, no doubt, certainly not sound, for she in her stone prison was silent. Perhaps she sent some wireless message to him, but these things we cannot know. It was an hour yet to the day's breaking when the dog badger arrived at the kennels where his mate lay, frightened and exhausted after her terrible experience.

In the next kennel to hers, a low wall crowned with iron palings between them, were the three wiry little terriers she had fought that day, and the keeper certainly had not counted on her attempting to escape that side. Sniff-sniff-sniff her mate went all round her prison, and hearing him she rose and answered sniff for sniff. So they came to the gate, the entrance to the concrete yard, and for three feet up, the palings were covered on the inside with strongly stapled iron sheeting. Above that the bars were filled in with wire netting, but somehow the she badger climbed up, tore away the netting, but could not squeeze between the bars. Finding herself defeated, she did a very characteristic thing—she went back to her bed for the rabbit, and thrust it between the bars for the dog badger to carry home to her cubs. He did not need it, for he could easily have fed the cubs without her aid, yet he did not reason these things out, did not realize that by giving him the food to carry home she herself must go hungry. He simply did her bidding, because that was the way of their parental instincts.

Next morning the keeper told his employer, who, meantime, had written off to find a home for the captive badger, that she had eaten her rabbit and drunk her water, so that there was no doubt she would make out all right.

The following night the dog badger was back shortly after dusk, striving to find a way in for himself, which would mean a way out for his wife. Normally neither he nor she would have approached within half a mile of this place, which was a stronghold of man and dogs, for all their lives were spent in steering clear of man and his devilish advocates. They loved peace, and were ever striving for it, and the dog badger knew well the risk he ran in coming to this place. Yet he risked it all because his mate was there, and for an hour or more he explored silently, so silently that even the terriers did not know that he was there. He crept, flattened out, from point to point, all round her prison, mounting even to the corrugated iron roof, peering furtively down through the wire netting. But soon he learnt that it was all impregnable, and any beast but a badger would have given it up as a hopeless quest.

Not he, for when the windows of the keeper's cottage were darkened, he set to work to sink a shaft under the concrete floor,

thinking there might be a way up through the floor. The noise of his burrowing disturbed the dogs, which began to race round the kennel, till the hubbub awoke the keeper and his wife, and kept them awake. It was a raw, gusty night, and the man was in no mood to go across to the kennels, so eventually he got his gun and fired from his bedroom window at the corrugated iron roof. The noise was terrifying enough as the shot smote and ricocheted, and for two hours thereafter there was silence.

Some time before dawn the bedlam began again, for the male badger was back at his digging. So with the first grey light, the keeper dressed and went across to the kennels. What a sight met his gaze! For on the gravel walk were several barrow loads of newly turned earth, and opposite it a dark hole leading down under the concrete floor. He thrust in his stick, but could not touch the end of it at arm's length, but once again he found that the female badger, now hiding in the darkest corner of her den, had disposed of her rabbit.

The hole was filled in with stones and tar, and the following night half a dozen fox traps were cunningly hidden all round the kennels. Again the dog badger came back, again the keeper and his wife were kept awake by the yapping of the terriers, and at about two in the morning the keeper could tolerate it no longer. He went across, thinking from the noise that the male badger must be fast in one of his traps, but to his chagrin he found every trap dragged out and sprung, and some, indeed, were marked with the sign of a wild beast's uttermost contempt.

When daylight came the keeper made a discovery which interested him not a little, for he found in the kennel the tail feathers of one of his sacred hand-reared pheasants. The rabbit he had left as food for the badger was gone; there remained not the faintest sign of it, and here, in its place, the tell-tale tail feathers.

The keeper thought it out, and there was only one way in which he could account for it. In all his long experience of badgers, he had always found that they left the skin and generally the legs of any rabbits they got—usually from the rabbit-catcher's snares—but though he searched the kennel most minutely, and even beat out the bedding, no scrap of rabbit could he find. The torn netting

above the door provided a clue—she had not eaten the rabbits at all! She had poked them between the bars for her mate to carry home, which meant that, after all, they certainly had cubs somewhere. Last night her mate had brought a pheasant for her, but true to her own motherly ideas she had given her own food for him to carry home, though she had accepted gladly enough his gift to her.

When the keeper told his employer about this, both men were thoughtful. "It's a pity to disturb their lives," said the proprietor. "Goodness knows, they do little enough to deserve it. They may lift a pheasant now and then under exceptional circumstances such as these, but the trouble is that the hunting people don't want them, and we've got to keep them down."

"I'd rather have a dozen badgers than a single stinking verminous fox!" observed the keeper. "Aye, or even a brace of poaching cats!"

"I, too," replied the other, "but badgers won't run to hounds. They only dig earth retreats where a hard-pressed fox can hide and spoil the chase. They give the earth stopper too much to do, for—well, it is impossible to run a fox to death when there are badger setts everywhere. A pity you can't catch the dog badger, then you could send them away together."

"No good, sir," said the keeper. "Not if they have cubs, which seems pretty evident. If you want a badger to live, it must be out of the breeding season. Take one away from its mate and its cubs and it will just fret and fret and starve itself—after shifting all heaven and earth to get away."

"This one seems to be all right," said the proprietor, nodding towards the kennels, and the keeper shrugged his shoulders. "She won't fret so long as her mate is hanging round and feeding her. If we got rid of him I believe she would, but she'll probably live all right if she is taken away and set loose somewhere else."

A letter was expected by any post now saying that the captive was to be sent off, and the keeper would be glad when his responsibilities in the matter ended, for apart from sleepless nights, he never knew what the dawn would reveal, some morning he almost expected to find his kennel completely capsized!

But it seemed that the badgers now had their plans cut and dried, for the following night they went straight and steadily to work on a fixed plan of escape. The floor, the roof, and three of the walls they had found to be impregnable, and there remained only the fourth wall, the one between the prisoner and the fiery little terriers, bred to fight in the dingy alleyways of the earth. It was an incredibly brave thing the male badger did, for his first move was to scrape away and dig aside the stone step under the gate of the terriers' kennel. That in itself was a massive task, but thereafter he had only to force his way up into the enclosure, then the band began to play. The keeper heard the yapping and snarling through his dreams, but he had become used to such sounds, and did not waken till his wife stirred him. "Listen tae thae dogs!" she muttered. "Can ye no bestir yersel'? Something's wrong, ye may be sure. Ye'll need to go and see."

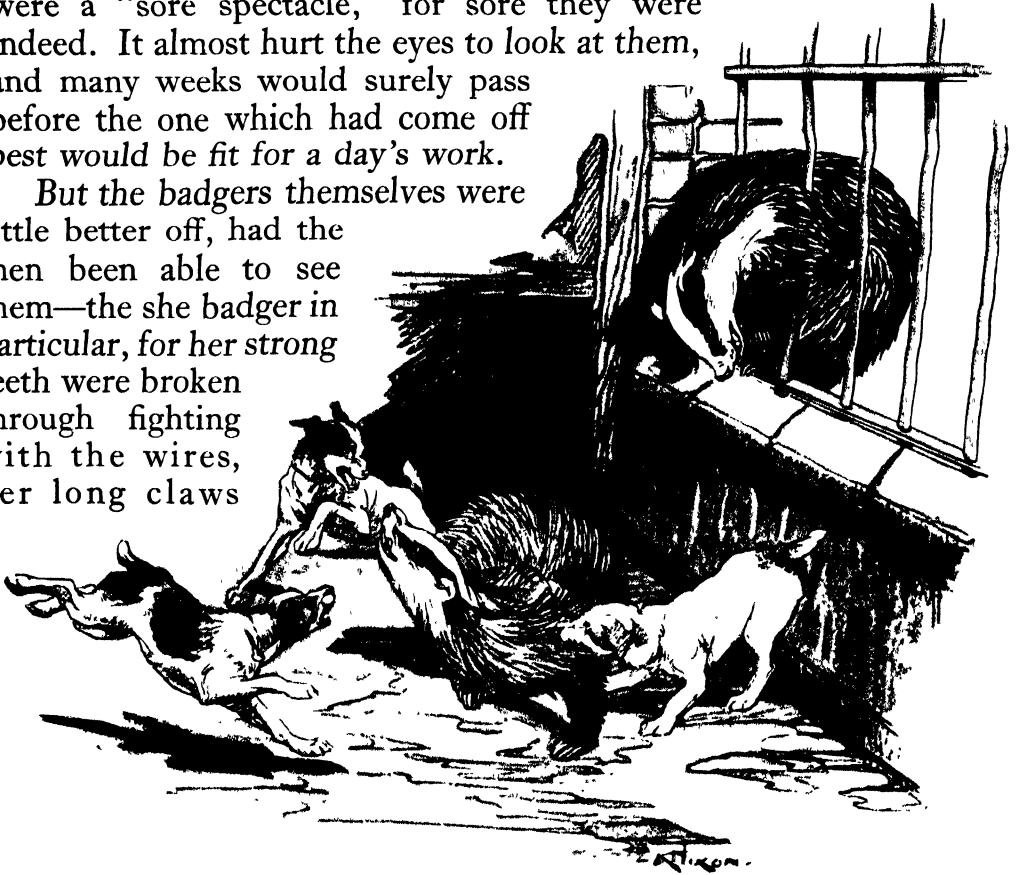
Still the keeper dallied awhile, little thinking of the desperate encounter which was going on in his kennels. Whether it was the terriers who had the badger cornered, or the badger which had cornered them, would never be known, but at all events they were fighting in a corner, the darkest corner of the closed kennel. There the ground was littered with hair and smeared with blood, and meantime, above the general din, the she badger was on top of the low intermediate wall, tearing away the wire netting, then fighting to squeeze her way through between the bars. There was a space slightly wider than the rest between the stonework and the end bar, and it was here that she was struggling with all the desperation of a trapped and cornered beast.

"Sounds as though something's amiss," admitted the keeper at length, so he got up grudgingly, threw on some clothes, and taking his flash lamp, went out. The din inside the kennel was now subsiding a little, and going up silently the man switched on his light. For a moment he saw the she badger, trapped inexorably between the wall and the end rail. She was half-way through, the rail pressing deeply into her body, and if not already dead, she must surely be dying, so firmly was she held. The man threw open the kennel door, intending to beat her back, but as he did so, his legs were knocked from under him, the lamp fell from his hand, and he saw

something grey flash by in the gloom. There was a thud, then something else flashed, two grey things surely, one close behind the other!—so, snatching up his light, he again looked at the rail above. The she badger was no longer there! One final, desperate wrench, and she had freed herself on the side of liberty, leaving the bar bent as even a strong man could not have bent it.

So both badgers were gone, leaving behind them evidence of their tremendous strength, and really it did not matter much that they were gone, though when the keeper saw his terriers he thought much and said nothing. Words could not have described those terriers—what was left of them! The keeper, perhaps, summed it up best when, gravely shaking his head, he told his wife that they were a “sore spectacle,” for sore they were indeed. It almost hurt the eyes to look at them, and many weeks would surely pass before the one which had come off best would be fit for a day’s work.

But the badgers themselves were little better off, had the men been able to see them—the she badger in particular, for her strong teeth were broken through fighting with the wires, her long claws



The she badger was half-way through, the rail pressing deeply into her body

worn down to the quick through scratching at her prison. So it was the old story—man had gained nothing through interfering with their lives, and it would have been better for all had he left them alone. Still, they were alive, which was all that really mattered, and next night they carried their cubs far away, seeking for a corner more remote from man, as the badgers are ever seeking.

The Compass

IT was winter—real winter. No great weight of snow had as yet fallen, but there had been days of sleet and squall and rain, intercepted by nights of frost. Every peat hag was full, every burn overflowing, and such weather is a deadlier tax upon the wild folk than frost and snow, for it bears the chill which finds and clings. To-night it was cold, with a raw, bitter coldness, and there was a taste of snow in the air.

McFarlane was watching the stony face of Kirkalder through his telescope. He was, by years of observation, a weather-wise man, but to him the wild beasts were an infallible barometer. He expected bad weather, and so he was watching the mountain face for confirmation.

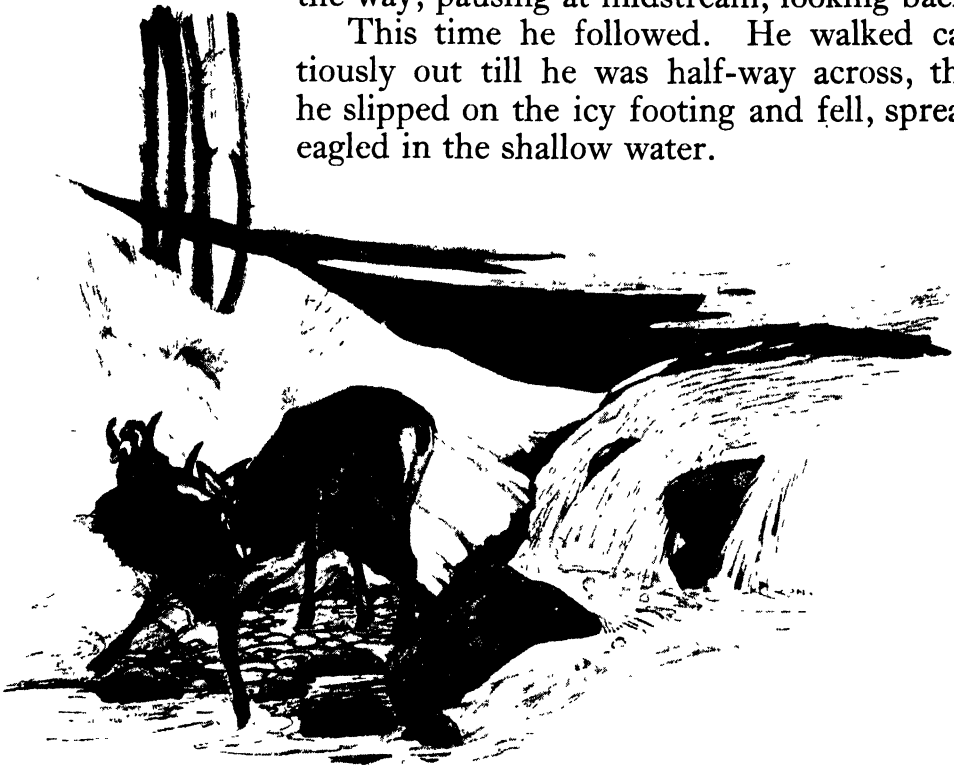
He saw a great company of hinds—red deer hinds—come over the rise from the snowy heights. There must have been ninety of them—such a herd as one sees on Kirkalder only when the Weather Goddess holds something in her lap. They came rapidly down from the high country as though they had been disturbed, save that there were no backward glances. An old hind led—behind her her sisters, stepping high and casting wide the crystals as they made for the forest border. A torrent crossed their path beneath the hoary summit, but the old hind knew the crossing and plunged boldly in, the pack behind her almost treading each other under in their eagerness to cross. Then came the younger hinds and the calves of that year, and, lastly, the stags, idly bringing up the rear and somewhat blasé towards the panic-stricken stampede. They, too, went on towards the woodland shelter, and apparently the rush was ended, when, far in the wake of the rest, two dark figures moved into relief.

One was a great stag, but thin and gaunt, dragging wearily across the drifts. On his back was a burden of clotted snow and ice, the accumulated load of many cruel days—accumulated because he had lacked the strength and the animal warmth to rid himself of it; till

now, indeed, combined with the weight of his spreading antlers, it threatened to crush him in his tracks. The other moving figure was a young hind, probably in the prime of life. If she possessed a calf, it had gone on with the others, and now her wide, anxious eyes were fixed upon the struggling hart. Round and round him she ran, repeatedly returning to sniff his nostrils, leading the way for him, encouraging him the best she knew, till at length they reached the torrent, and the hind plunged eagerly across.

She looked back, waiting, but he did not follow. Instead, he sought the down grade, for evidently he knew his own strength—or rather his weakness. The hind plunged back and found a new crossing for him, leading the way, but again he sniffed and went on down. Anon she returned, running alongside him, till he found a place at which he seemed to think he could cross, and again she led the way, pausing at midstream, looking back.

This time he followed. He walked cautiously out till he was half-way across, then he slipped on the icy footing and fell, spread-eagled in the shallow water.



The young hind stood dejectedly over Monarch, sniffing sadly

A moment he lay, then at length he struggled up and gained the other side. But the bank was steep and festooned with ice, and he could not mount it. Three times he tried and fell, and the third time he did not try to rise. He lay hunched-up among the pillars of ice, and McFarlane, knowing the temperament of wild deer, saw that he had given in. Sorely tried through many weeks, vexed beyond measure at his own weakness, he now owned himself beaten, and McFarlane knew that nothing would induce that stag to rise again and continue the losing fight.

Evidently the hind knew this also, for all her anxiety and watchfulness seemed to go. She stood dejectedly over him, sniffing him sadly, then she gazed after her sisters, already in the safe harbourage of the forest borders. Would she follow them? No. Her task was clearly marked. For her it remained to stand by her lord, lending at least the comfort of her company till he would need her no longer.

McFarlane closed his telescope with a click.

"Alec," he shouted to one of the boys in the lodge, over the gate of which he was leaning, "get the pony and the sledge. The big Royal is down in the burn."

The boy appeared—a typical hill boy, fit and eager for his work. "Which stag?" he queried. "D'ye mean the braw beast the marquis shot at?"

"Aye," replied McFarlane. "That's him. If we're quick, we'll get him down before the storm."

So the men went up with the sledge, and as they drew near the distressed pair, the conduct of the hind was pathetic to watch. She whistled and barked, plunging wildly this way and that, but repeatedly returning to the stag, bidding him rise for his life, even pawing at him savagely with her forehoofs. But he did not stir, watching the men with a strangely indifferent gaze. And so, by skilful manœuvring, they got their ropes round him and loaded him into the sledge, just as they would have loaded so much venison. There they tied him securely, and started home, but the blinding fury of the blizzard got there first, blotting out all landmarks and forcing the men to cling to the pony for guidance.

Again among familiar surroundings, they made their way to the pound in the sheltered policies of the estate—a large enclosure with

adequate shelters and a high rail fence, designed for park-feeding the best blood of the range. In such a storm they could do nothing, so the sledge with its living load was dragged into shelter and left there. When morning came they would attend to the sorely stricken stag and set him free.

By then the storm had blown itself out, and they found that the hind had followed the stag into the pound and was with him there. McFarlane closed the gate.

"We'll keep her with him," said he. "He'll settle all the better."

"Gee, but he's a braw beast!" added Alec. "A few days of feeding and shelter, and he'll be just the stag we want to send away."

It is at times necessary to introduce new blood to the wild deer herds, and stags of outstanding value are worth shipment to other ranges. So Monarch's old wound, which had caused his downfall, was dressed and set right, and with his favourite hind as company, he was left to recover in the big enclosure.

All this may seem strange to those who know the ways of the antlered cattle of the hills, for free love is the order of their kind—free love, and as many loves as each can win by dint of horn and hoof. Those lifelong partnerships, the interest of both parents in the young—features which endear so many of our wild creatures to the sympathy of man—are not to be found among these kingly beasts of the hill; but even so, sometimes a kingly stag is kingly in manners as in looks, and among his many hinds there is one who is dearer to him than the rest—one at whom he never slashes with his antlers and who is with him at all seasons, even when the curse of Job might be upon the hills. For him, as for the rest, the Love Moon is but a passing season, and when the other stags saunter off to live *en garçon* among themselves, here a little herd of stags, here two or three living quietly together, the master stag retires with his favourite hind to seek some sheltered place, and there they live their lives together and alone.

The two deer in the pound made no rebellion against their confinement. At first the stag was too weak to refuse man's favours, and as he regained strength he became accustomed to the new order. The hind attuned her mood to his, and ere many days were past

they were waiting at the manger when Alec filled it, ready to take their food from his very hands.

Given an abundance of such fare as the hill did not provide, the stag rapidly recovered, and when he was fit again, McFarlane decided to be quit of the hind, who certainly stood in no need of pound feeding. It was time she returned to her sisters on the hill, so one day the stalker and his son went down to let her out. Separating the two deer, they drove the hind through the open gate, then quickly closed it, but no sooner had Monarch realized that he was alone than he heard her call to him from beyond the enclosure.

Then it was that McFarlane received one of the surprises of his life, for up went the massive head, bearing aloft its crown of crooked branches, and with eyes crackling fire, Monarch charged the wooden fencing, leaping far up, and meeting the larch crossbars with a crash. There was, however, no surmounting that barrier, and he fell back, sprawling grotesquely, but only to rise again and again to crash into the fence. Both men feared he would cripple himself by his desperate efforts to escape, and McFarlane cried:

"We've made a mistake, laddie. Get the net; we'll have to fix him straight away."

Fortunately the net was handy, and when again the stag crashed into the fencing and fell, this time half stunned, he rose to find the strong meshes enveloping him. He shook his head, bucking like a broncho, and started off across the pound at tremendous speed. Midway he fell, and struggling wildly, trussed himself up in a hopeless entanglement. Other men came, ropes were drawn taut, and within ten minutes the master stag of Kirkalder lay helplessly trussed.

McFarlane took a saw and sawed off both antlers at the lowest fork, otherwise Monarch would have proved an unwieldy freight for passage abroad. The operation caused him no pain, as the antlers were dry and lifeless at that season, and ere long he would have shed them in Nature's ordinary course. Next a light motor-van, carrying a narrow wooden crate, was run into the pound, and Monarch was slid up a plank and into the crate, where, standing upright, he was barred in with wooden struts, so that he could hardly stir. A canvas hammock was slung under him to bear the weight

of his body if he wished to rest, and thus, impotent and a captive, his ropes were removed, and the van bore him off.

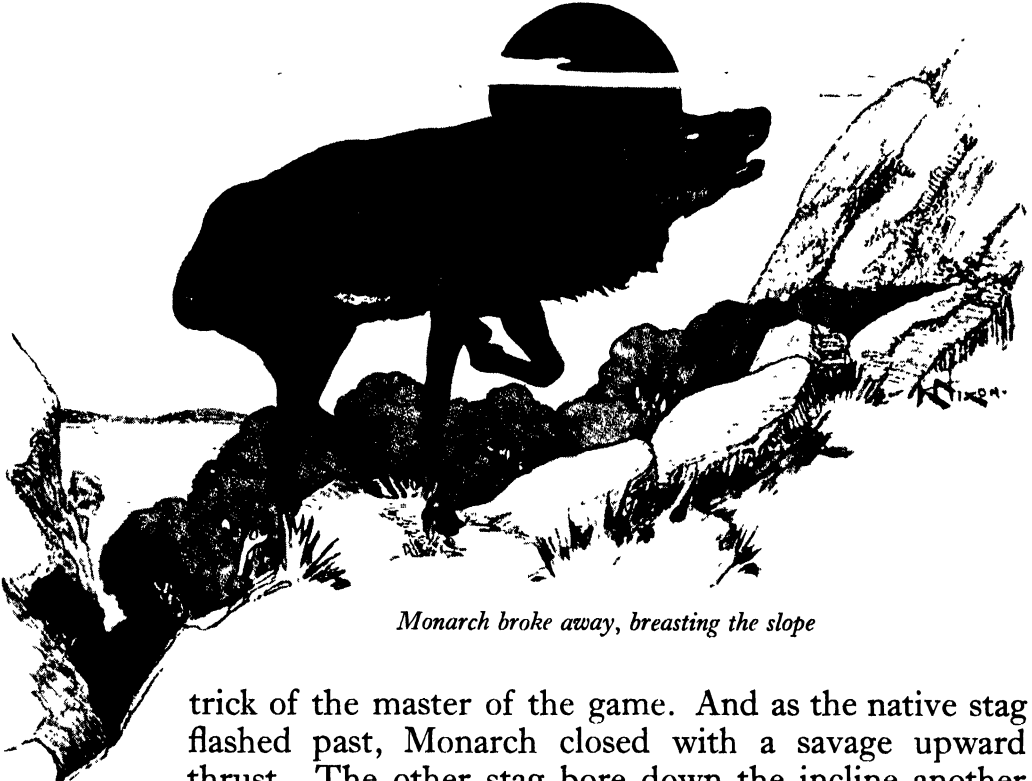
There followed a twelve-mile journey over the tortuous Highland road, and Monarch, in his crate, could see nothing, yet it would seem that that compass of a brain of his marked every bend. At the landing-stage he had a long wait for the ferry, and in the darkness of night, with strange lights floating everywhere, amidst the bedlam of human voices, the hiss of steam, and the rattle of rusty winches, Monarch was slung, revolving, aboard, and dumped on deck. Many people came and spoke sympathetically to him, caressing his coat, but of all these things Monarch, bewildered and dazed, kept little count. So the steamer left port, and swung out through a blinding rain by the mysterious ways of the sea—first south, then west, then north again, till, in the glimmering dawn, she again bumped harbour.

Two swarthy sons of the hills were awaiting him, and an hour later Monarch was released. Behind him was a cottage, much like McFarlane's cottage, with its low-built bothie, ahead a towering range, white-capped and infinite, such a range as he had known since he trotted at his mother's heels, a tiny speckled calf, on the slopes of wild Kirkalder.

Monarch broke away, breasting the slope in free, triumphant bounds, anxious only to leave the haunts of man and the sounds of man behind. Away towards the heights he went, by rugged, unknown paths, yet sticking to the trails which the deer of that range trod, crossing the burn where a thousand thousand of his kind had crossed before him.

From the heights, bright eyes were watching, and now they came down to meet him—the stranger in a strange land. The hinds gathered round in a timid circle, their big ears up as they sniffed the air, and Monarch strode stiff-legged and defiant before their scrutiny.

Another stag came down, antlered and immense—maybe the master stag. He stared defiantly at the strange beast with the sawn-off horns and the smell of man upon his coat, then he charged, but Monarch stood his ground. On his own range he had risen high by force of horn and hoof, but here he was unknown. He stood his ground, I say, but at the last moment he swung aside—that deadly



Monarch broke away, breasting the slope

trick of the master of the game. And as the native stag flashed past, Monarch closed with a savage upward thrust. The other stag bore down the incline another twenty feet, then fell to his knees. Monarch's horns, though the merest stumps, were still effective stabbing weapons, so the challenger fell in his tracks and the hinds gathered round, while the stalkers, watching through their telescopes from the ledge below, cursed their ill luck at losing such a beast.

Monarch did not stay to see what he had done; he did not care. He went on and up, searching every point for a familiar mark, sniffing every sea-borne breeze for a familiar scent. Of all wild creatures, the red deer of the hills possess in the strongest sense a love of home. Take a deer from his native range when he is but a fawn, and he will settle happily in other lands. But let him grow up among his own surroundings, let him leave his mother and mate and find his place among his people, and his love of that land will be undying. You may move him if you choose, but as to whether he will stay in the strange country is open to question. He *may*,

or again, he may perish by ways such as would never befall a stag whose native range it is.

By dawn Monarch had reached the height of land, and below, far below, was the crinkled sea. Beyond that lay a barrier of mist, hiding the mainland, but that compass of a brain of his could not lie. Not so many weeks ago, Monarch had feared to cross the icy burn, but then he knew his strength. To-day that knowledge was denied him, or perhaps he did not care. Life—death! What did it matter? His trail was clearly marked. The needle point had swung and could not waver. So down the slippery, weed-grown rocks, and out across the placid, mist-draped blue, Monarch set his trail.

Five hours later a ferry steamer sighted him heading for the mainland. He was swimming east, and the nearest island in his wake was nine miles away. Clearly the big beast with the sawn-off antlers was dead beat, for though he swam with steady strokes, he was hardly making headway, yet he was still many miles from shore.

A few minutes later a motor-boat ran alongside the ferry for the mails, and received news of the big stag heading across from the island. So the pilot set out to look for him, and found him. They made a rope fast to Monarch's horns, passing the noose about his muzzle to keep it clear of the water, and thus they took him in tow.

Strange and wonderful beyond belief may be the adventures of a child of the Wild whose natural order man diverts, and assuredly Monarch was to have his share. An hour later he lay exhausted under a breakwater, while the little sons and daughters of men gathered round him and caressed him sympathetically. The children shovelled sand over him to dry his coat, the men brought straw and covered him, and later Monarch munched a pickle or two of maize from an enamelled bowl held by a portly housewife.

Then suddenly, unexpectedly, he rose. He shook himself, and the crowd scattered. A wild fear came into his eyes, as though he had suddenly wakened from a dream, then he turned, leapt the breakwater, and still heading east, cleared the sea-wall and its iron railing and gained the security of the woods. And thence to the east, lay range after range of rugged indigo.

Some days later a salmon fisher, plying his craft, was startled by a great stag plunging into the water straight behind him—a stag whose antlers were sawn off short.

Yet another week, and on the hill road many miles west of that place the postman on his cycle heard the repeated barking of a stag along the deer fence which marked the march between McFarlane's forest and the wilds beyond. "Woff-woff-woff!" then a sudden "ping," as something smote the high wire screen, striving evidently to force a way through. Next moment the stag loomed up through the heather, but, seeing the man, he wheeled about and again charged the fencing, only to be thrown back into the roadway—a big stag, hornless now, and gaunt and thin and tottering, as though he had travelled far and eaten little.

Then the postman saw, on the other side of the fencing, a young hind, and he recognized her as the hind which for some time past had haunted the western march, hanging wistfully about the policies of the mansion house. They had come to know her as the tame hind, for she had lost her fear of man in her eternal searching, searching of that place; but now she, too, was running up and down, keeping pace with the stag, both animals becoming desperate at the sight of the man, lest once again their freedom should be taken from them.

So the postman watched and wondered, till at length a little roebuck, disturbed by the bedlam, rose from the heather and went straight through the deer fence as a mackerel goes through a salmon net. If there is a broken wire anywhere, trust the roe-deer to know it, and instantly the big stag turned and followed his little cousin. Through the gap he thrust his massive shoulders, then irresistibly he forced his way. The high screen sagged and shook and groaned, but the stag went on and through, bearing with him a tangle of crumpled wires. The hind ran up, and they sniffed each other's faces, then away they sped towards the stony heights, grunting to each other as they ran, till at length, where the mist wraiths shut the crags from view, the stag lay down and the hind stood over him, watching their back-trail, her big ears up.

So the postman left them, and McFarlane grinned a wide, wide grin when he heard of it, for assuredly he had struck a good bargain.

He had sold his master stag, and the stag had returned, the how and the why of which was even to him a mystery. By sea and loch and land, by tortuous ways and snowy heights, through woodlands that he did not know, the stag had come, but was it the call of his native land, or a higher, nobler call which had led him back to the range where he had lived and loved?

The Bait

JIMMIE ORDISH was crossing the range when he struck a trail of white feathers—just a feather here and there, clinging to the grass tips, as though the creature which had carried the feathery load had at intervals laid it down to readjust its grip. Jimmie looked to the left across the valley, with its purple pines and his own white-walled steading, and about the latter he saw several white specks—his own White Leghorns to boot, on which he laid great store. Then he glanced to the right where the hillside rose, with here and there a patch of whins or a strip of wind-scraggled birches. Circumstantial evidence was strong, for of late Ordish had missed several birds, so he followed the trail uphill, and within a hundred yards the tell-tale feathers led him to the edge of a swampy patch, lying down in a hollow, rank with swamp grasses and lichen-bearded birch trees. This was a lonely hillside, and that was a lonely patch, for the ground was uncertain, and rarely, indeed, did man enter within the shadows of those birches. But Ordish went on, following the trail of white feathers.

At first he sank to the knees, then the going became better, till in the centre of the patch, which covered perhaps an acre, he found a rising mound, high and dry, though covered like the rest with long grass.

Here the mountain vixen had her open-air den, and how is it that these open-air dens are peculiar to the hill country? How is it that the hill vixens only resort to the practice of open-air nurseries, while the foxes of the hunting shires nurse their cubs invariably beneath the ground? Is it because the hill vixen has learnt by sad experience that Mother Earth may prove faithless? In the shires the cubs are secure from man, but in the hills, where there is no hunting, the den of the vixen is dug out, and her cubs killed whenever possible. So, indeed, may the hill vixen come to know that it is safer to rear her cubs in the open than it is to trust to the shelter of Mother Earth.



The vixen was watching him from somewhere up the mountain face

Ordish spent an interesting twenty minutes, for in the centre of the rising ground was a trodden patch, and from it little runways radiated in all directions, connecting outer rings, and forming, as it were, a spider's web of runways, embracing the whole central portion of the swamp. He stood at the topmost point, and there he pictured the aspect from the vixen's point of view as she lay on guard. How cunningly she had chosen the site! Round her and about her were her cubs, but lying there she could keep good guard over them. Away to the east she obtained a full view of the mountain face, thanks to a break in the birches. Danger could not approach her in that direction without her seeing it. Away to the

west her view was obscured, but from that direction came the prevailing wind, and she could "watch with her nostrils," which were every bit as quick as her eyes. Downhill she could see, though she herself was unseen, thanks to the trellis-work of the silver birches, and uphill, too, she could watch if she wished to do so, but to the wild folk danger rarely comes downhill. It is the foe creeping up from below which they fear.

Yes, the vixen had chosen her quarters well, and next Ordish set himself to examine the playground of the cubs. It was, as I say, a network of runways all round the point from which their mother kept guard over them, and about these runways Ordish found their playthings, left as a child might leave its toys. Here the leg of a lamb, sun-dried and sand-dried, there the wing of a grouse, and anon the backbone of a White Leghorn, cleanly picked, and all about the runways the litter of white feathers, such as Ordish had seen leading up the mountain face. Ordish knew that the vixen had watched him as he toiled up; knew that she had slipped out with her cubs by the back way, and that at this very moment, probably, she was watching him from somewhere up the mountain face. For evident it was that the foxes had been here but a few minutes before him, for everywhere was the nauseous, musky taint which is fox in the abstract.

At all events the vixen had clearly given him the slip, and he was about to leave the place when he distinctly saw a movement in the rushes at his feet; and there, at the dead end of a little tunnel in the grass, he found one of the cubs crouching. The little creature was so young as still to be dependent upon its mother, and it lay with its nose between its forepaws, looking up at him as he parted the rushes, but making no attempt to escape.

Ordish reached down and picked it up. Of course, it struggled and kicked, biting at his sleeve with its sharp, pearly teeth, but it was glad enough to hide its face in the crook of his arm and to snuggle down quiescent.

Ordish fell to thinking. Were the other cubs hiding near at hand? For if so he might bag the whole litter. He searched carefully, beating the cover with his stick, working systematically for thirty minutes, but convinced in his own mind that the search would

prove fruitless. Perhaps, then, the cub he carried was the sick or weakly member of the litter, so he examined it carefully. Yes, the poor little creature was injured in one of the forepaws, having by some mishap lost a claw, which had caused the paw to swell. That, then, was why it had chosen to hide instead of scampering off with mother and the rest.

But Ordish was satisfied with his find, for he felt sure now of bagging the vixen, which would mean the extermination of the whole litter, since the cubs were too young to live without their mother. To-night sunset would merge into moonlight with no intervening spell of darkness, so he took the cub home, made it comfortable in a bed of hay, and at sundown he sallied forth, the cub under one arm, his gun under the other. Round the neck of the little captive he had fastened a dog collar, and fast to the collar was a thin steel wire.

On the uphill side of the swamp grew a solitary pine, and hammering a staple into the trunk of it Ordish made fast the cub at the foot of the tree, forty yards from the swamp. Then he climbed into one of the birch trees on the downwind side, taking up his position among the branches, so that he could command a full view of every approach to the pine. If the parents came, his body scent would pass over them, and he knew well that wild animals rarely think of looking up into the branches for a foe. No, without question the vixen would come back for her lost cub immediately she had located him—probably the dog fox, too.

It was a clear, cloudless night, and there was the radiant moon rising low over the range as the sun dipped from view, ready to take up duty as day merged into night. Slowly the quietude settled, and the sounds of the day—the singing of birds, the distant yapping of sheepdogs, the mellow lowing of cattle wafting up from the valley—gave way to the sounds of night. A heron croaked, an owl hooted, and a woodcock flew by, grunting and squeaking, in the gloom. Night had come, and still the mountain face remained clearly visible in every detail.

The cub was hungry, and, as Ordish thought would be the case, it began to Kee-wa-wa for its mother with the waking of its night instincts. It yapped, it howled, it pointed its little wet muzzle to the sky and filled the night with melancholy cadences. Twenty minutes

passed, then Ordish heard a dull “yap-yarr” coming from over the ridge, and knew instantly that it came from one of the parents.

Keenly alert, the man waited, and soon he saw the vixen move into relief over a ridge just out of range, looking in the direction of the cub. A minute or so she stood there, then she disappeared, and he saw her at another point, still looking this way, and still just out of range. Again she vanished, and when next she appeared she was on the downwind side, such wind as there was, and Ordish had an uncomfortable notion that she had him skied. But he did not stir, and he saw her head go up as she tested the night air, then she uttered two short yaps and disappeared.

Had she located him? Ordish could not credit it, and at all events, with the cub howling so frenziedly, he was sure her desperation would get the better of her sound judgment as the night wore on, and that she would move within range.

But Ordish was wrong in this, for that night he did not see the vixen again, though he could hear her all round him—at times whimpering and whining, and once or twice she uttered a sound which went right down to where he lived and called him a would-be murderer. It was a long-drawn broken sob, such as a vixen utters when she finds her home broken and her children gone—such as a human mother might utter on hearing her little ones cry for food she could not give them.

So Ordish began to take another view of the task he had set himself. Would the vixen come within range? He told himself that that was what he was hoping for, yet he almost wished that someone else might take his place. Somehow it did not seem a white man’s trick—trading thus on the highest instincts of a wild creature to bring about its destruction; yet man must bring his supreme intellect to bear in attaining the destruction of the mountain fox, which otherwise would come to possess the hills.

So, alone with the splendour of the night in that lonely place, Ordish reasoned with himself, till at length the moon passed from view and darkness fell. Then he slipped briskly from his hiding, took up the cub, and returned home, where he fed the starving little creature with milk.

Next night Ordish did the same thing over again, save that this

time he climbed into another tree still nearer to the pine under which he fastened the cub; and again, shortly after sundown, the vixen appeared and began to circle round. To-night she seemed even more desperate, for she called ceaselessly, appearing so rapidly from point to point that Ordish was half of a mind both parents were there. He could hear the cub scratching at the ground and whimpering as it struggled to escape. He could hear the little creature's teeth upon the wire as it crouched in the shadow of the pine, at intervals answering its mother's calls.

Distances are deceptive in the moonlight, and half a dozen times Ordish raised his gun at the skulking shadow in the offing, deciding each time that a better chance would come, and regretting the decision a moment later. So presently the cub, evidently becoming exhausted, ceased to whimper, and soon after clouds shut off the light and the chances of another night were gone.

When Ordish climbed down to the cub he saw how frenziedly the little creature had tried to escape. The wire was kinked in a dozen places, and holes were scratched in the soft ground within his radius of travel, evidently where he had tried to bury the whole hopeless business. On one side was a heap of torn-up grass, as though the little animal had endeavoured to make a bed for itself, but Ordish closed his eyes to these things, for it was a matter of civic duty to kill the vixen.

Yet as the man took the little captive in his arms he was surprised at the firmness and rotundity of the body, for several hours must have elapsed since it last fed. When he got home this was explained, for the cub would not drink its milk, and Ordish realized with a shock that in spite of his vigilance the mother had somehow contrived to creep in. Yes, unquestionably she had fooled him, for the cub was well fed, and this explained the crumpled wire, the holes scratched in the ground, and the bed of dry grass.

Well, she had fooled him once, but she would not fool him again. What had happened was quite clear. The vixen had first located his whereabouts, then she had crept up from the opposite side of the pine till she gained the shadow of it, within the friendly shelter of which she had attained the needful. To-night she would try the same trick, but—well, man's brain is bound to triumph in the end.

That evening two men sauntered up the hillside, both carrying guns, for Ordish had enlisted the services of a very able assistant, who shared whole-heartedly his hatred of the red outlaws. This man was a dead-sure shot, and knew well the ways of foxes, and when they reached the scene he took up hiding under a boulder, covering himself with heather, on the uphill side of the pine. Ordish fastened the cub as before, and took up his place in the silver birch just as on the night previously. Thus the tree was between them, and surely no creature larger than a rat could gain it unobserved.

The moon was later in rising, but there was no intervening darkness, and it was not until the moon was up that they heard the foxes circling round. Surely from the noise, both parents were there, but again the hours dragged by, and though constantly they saw one or other out of range, neither man dared to attempt a shot. It seemed a longer vigil than before, and midnight was well past ere they climbed down.

Then as Ordish was about to take up the cub he paused and stared at his companion. "The vixen has been!" he said, scarcely able to believe his own words.

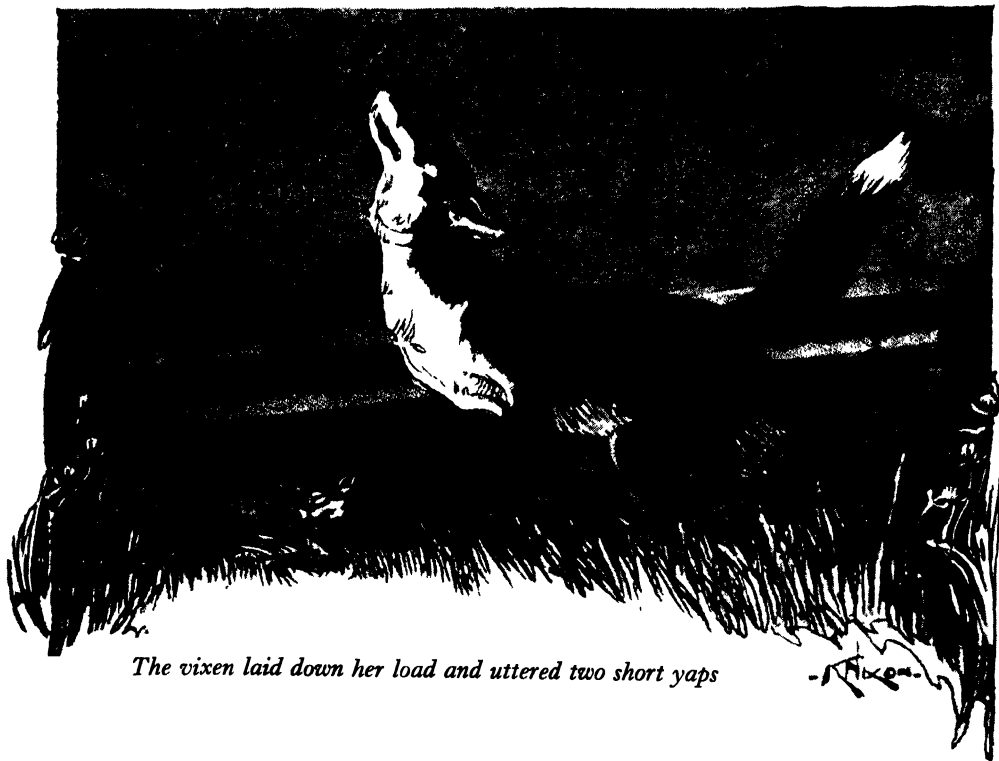
His companion stared. That fact was indisputable, for the cub, which otherwise would have been near starvation, was again well fed.

The men passed few comments, for each was perfectly certain that the other had dozed off or in some way relaxed his vigilance. Each, indeed, was a little nettled that the other had let him down, for it had been a long, cold vigil, with bedtime calling. And on the way home each did his best to convince the other that the varmint had not crept in on *his* side.

"Well," said Ordish finally, "I've spent near a week at this business, and I'm getting fed up with it. I'll try another night, but it's the last. And I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll set half a dozen traps all round the tree just out of reach of the cub, and if that doesn't get her nothing will."

So they carried this plan into effect, skilfully placing a veritable cordon of traps round the captive cub, then they took up their stations as before.

But that night was an exact repetition of the previous night, save



The vixen laid down her load and uttered two short yaps

that this time both men tried long-range shots as the vixen appeared. But evidently the shots went wide, for she was soon back again, though more warily, calling and crying as before. Finally she disappeared, and for one hour, two hours, the silence was unbroken.

Just before the light failed Ordish slipped from his hiding and gave a low whistle—the decided signal. There was no answer, so he went quietly up to his companion, whistling softly at intervals to avoid mishap.

“Yes!” exclaimed Ordish. “Asleep, as I thought! You might as well have stayed at home.”

The other man started up, chilled and dazed, and by no means at his best, having been caught napping. Words followed, and each of them cursed the whole business, saying that anyway he was done with it. But reaching the pine, they found they had no alternative in that matter, for there at their feet lay a crumpled wire, and fast

to the end of it only the old dog collar, gnawed clean through—The cub—the vixen were gone!

Words may be adequate for the ordinary conditions of life, but now Ordish found himself silent. He shouldered his gun and turned away, leaving his companion to follow at his own speed.

Daylight was very near as they reached the edge of the plateau, and here the other man called Ordish to come back. Being Scotsmen, they did not waste words, for clearly the other man had formulated some idea which would explain itself in due course.

So they both sauntered back towards the pine, and as they drew within sight of it both men saw something move into relief over the ridge away to the east. That something was a fox, or rather a vixen, for in its jaws it was carrying something large and unwieldy—yes, a cub! Safely out of range, it turned and looked at them, then it laid down its load and uttered two short yaps, as though of mockery, and disappeared.

They went up to the pine, and the other man said: "Yes, as I thought! Look at these muddy paw-marks five feet up the trunk! Look where she crouched in the fork, watching us set the traps and make fast the cub! She was there, ready and waiting for him, and it was the dog fox all the time which kept us busy looking in the opposite direction!"

It took some moments for the facts to sink in, then Ordish laughed—yes, he laughed! And as again he turned away, he muttered, "Nerve! Sheer nerve! And she deserves it!"

So man's brain does not always triumph in the end.

The Black Wolf of the Silvertrail

SPRING comes quickly in the valley of the Silvertrail—or, rather, winter lingers till the warmth of the northward journeying sun compels its quick release. One day a blizzard sweeps the landscape, and the wooded valleys are so lone and cold that even the chickadees have nothing to say, but the next bluebirds sing in the thickets, and a vast assortment of buzzing and piping insect life creeps into existence.

It is a kindly mantle, this long-lingering snow, for beneath it the spring flowers bud and mature, secure from wind and frost, so that when in an hour it is gone, the slopes are starred with flowers.

But to the woodland folk the snow is no friend. It tells too clearly the tale of their coming and going, betraying their most closely guarded secrets to the deadliest of their foes, and, though a few of them have learned a limited number of tricks whereby to break or deaden the scent trail, none has as yet aspired to the knowledge that these same tricks are worthless when the snow is on the ground.

Thus the snows of that winter had proved fatal to most of the wolves and coyotes of the Silvertrail, for Wolfer Wells was a hard and remorseless hunter, and he knew his business. As professional wolfer of the range he drew not only the Government bounty, but the ranch-owners had supplemented these rewards and kept the wolfer provided with all the necessary gear for his occupation. Now, with the coming of spring, the wolfer's harvest was ended, and he would have packed out to his home in Colorado had it not been for one considerable inducement to stay.

That inducement took form and personality in a huge black wolf which all winter had foiled the trapper's efforts, and scattered dust and ashes on his choicest sets.

The black wolf of the Silvertrail was well known to the punchers of the range, who had named him Starlight on account of his alleged

likeness to a black malemute famous the previous winter as the winner of the great Alaska sled race, for it was this wolf which had led and organized the many sheep raids which resulted in the establishment of Wolfer Wells. And now the ranch-owners, hearing that the black wolf was still free, asked Wells to remain on his own terms, till he had rid the country of this pest.

There was wisdom in this, for when a wolf of exceptional abilities remains in possession of its range, it will draw to that range other wolves to hunt in concert, and at all events the offspring of an exceptional wolf, if it be left to breed, are apt to prove as dangerous as their parent guide. Thus, though Wells had done his work well in exterminating the whole of Starlight's followers, he had failed in the one essential feature of his quest, for the leader of the pirates, the brain and organizer of those bloody nightly raids, was still at large, and if left in undisputed possession of the Silvertrail, next autumn and winter would prove but a repetition of the last.

Wells had fondly imagined that Starlight was the sole survivor of the desperado band, but that last fall of snow before the sudden dawning of the spring told him differently. It told him that Starlight had a mate, a wolf of normal size, though her tracks appeared insignificant against those of the grim old leader. He saw where the two wolves had run flank to flank from a wooded hollow along the banks of a creek which terminated finally at the mouth of a great canyon into which Wells could not follow.

The canyon, known for some obscure reason as the Valanese Cutting, had long been a wolf stronghold, and Wells now knew that somewhere in its rugged fastness Starlight and his mate would have their den. There, when the last of the geese had honked their way northward, eight or nine atoms of wolfish cubhood would come into existence, and Starlight and the dam, fondly thinking that the coming of their babies brought a truce with man, would pass fearlessly to and from the canyon in quest of the wherewithal to supply their hungry brood.

Wells's hunting now took on a different form. All winter he had carried a rifle and generally he had betrayed himself from afar by the things he carried over his shoulder. The wolves had watched his coming and going, the coyotes had yapped derision at him from

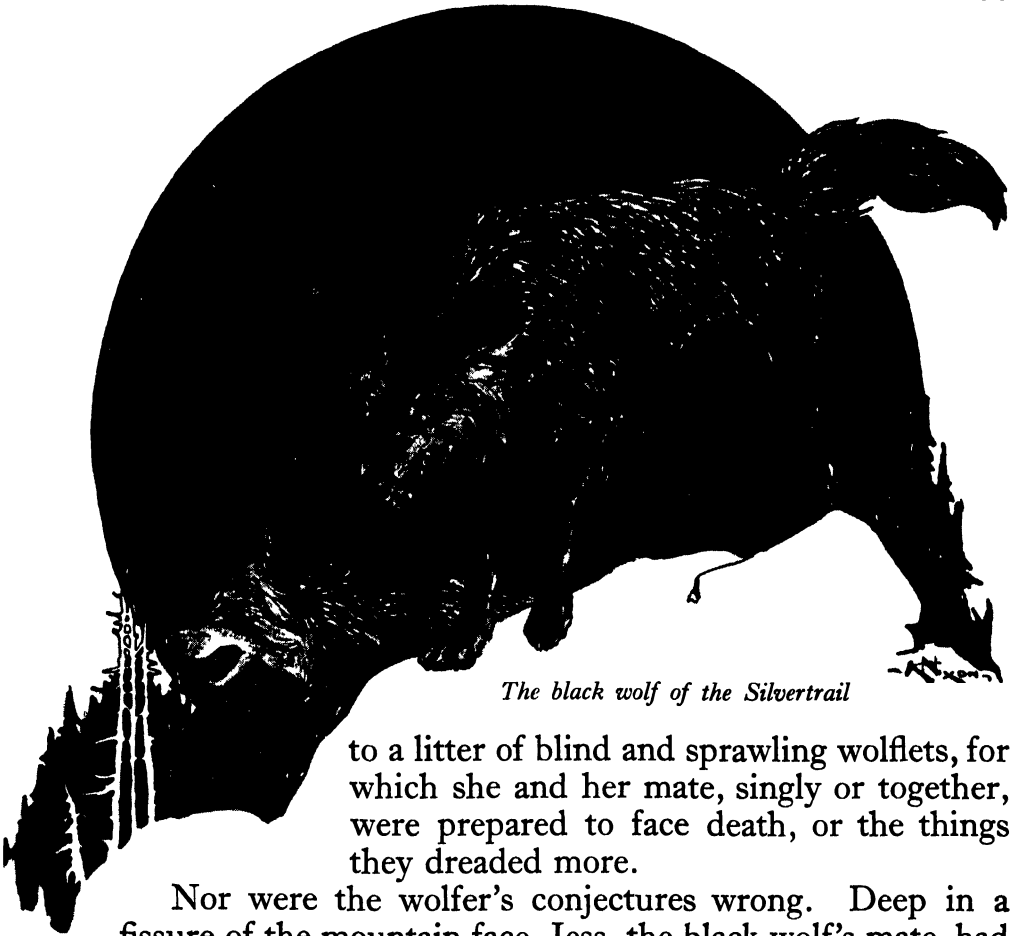
the near-by buttes so long as there were any of them left to yap, but with the coming of the warm still days of spring Wells became, from all appearances, a shiftless idler of the hills. Sometimes he would lie for hours in the sun, smoking unlimited blackjack, then he would wander slowly off to his cayuse, mount, and jog away, and any coyote or wolf watching him would say to its mate: "There goes that drunken, loafing cowboy! Let's yap at him again!" But Wells was watching—watching, and many things he came to know!

Firstly, he learned that Starlight's mate hopped on three legs every few paces, which meant that she had once been in a trap, so that he knew it would be of no use making any ordinary set for *her*. Secondly, he learned that this same she-wolf was bob-tailed, and since rumour asserted that it was a bob-tailed wolf that had been Starlight's second-in-command since the raids began, he knew her to be a wolf as clever as her lord, for with him she had survived when the rest had perished. As for the big black wolf—Wells saw him but once. The trapper was ambling towards his cayuse after a long and fruitless watch, when his quick eyes caught two large black points and a rounded scalp peering over a neighbouring ridge. Then he knew that Starlight had been watching *him*, and at once the man became absorbed in a pursuit of his half-forgotten boyhood. He began to pick flowers, picking and zigzagging here and there, and whistling a careless air as he went! It mattered not that there were no flowers to pick, nothing but pebbles and the thorny cacti, for the general trend of the wolfer's going was towards the wolf, and his right hand lay on the stock of the heavy automatic at his belt, with which he was a dead-sure shot at a most astounding range.

Soon, too soon, the big wolf turned into the mouth of the canyon, and there rumbled from the rocky depths such a thunder of hatred that even Wells paused and wondered.

It was not an ordinary wolf challenge that, uttered half in menace, half in bravado, but a full-throated bristling warning which meant: "You can idle about on the rest of the hills, but this is my range! If you follow me here you do so at your peril!"

To the trapper it explained why the she-wolf had left no tracks on the creek bank for some days past. To him it meant that somewhere in that rocky, inaccessible ravine the she-wolf had given birth



The black wolf of the Silvertrail

to a litter of blind and sprawling wolfflets, for which she and her mate, singly or together, were prepared to face death, or the things they dreaded more.

Nor were the wolfer's conjectures wrong. Deep in a fissure of the mountain face, Jess, the black wolf's mate, had that day realized an event of long anticipation in the production of nine squirming puppies. She did not leave the den that day nor the next, for Starlight supplied her needs. Gaily he would trot to the mouth of the cranny, wagging his big tail this way and that and asking his wife, as clearly as a wolf could ask: "May I come in and look?" But should he set his feet to enter Jess would lay back her ears and snarl a terrible forbidding, at which Starlight, somewhat crestfallen, would drop the prairie dog or chipmunk he was carrying at the mouth of the den and depart.

On the second day Jess went down to the creek to drink, and now we see that had any accident befallen her master she would not have starved during this period of enforced inaction. For,

having drunk, she scratched from under a rock a ptarmigan, truly in a distinctly "gamey" stage, but nevertheless good wolf fare, and having regarded it with cold yellow eyes and decided that she did not want it, she buried it with detailed care, trampled it well in, and dug from a second spot a very smelly woodchuck, which similarly she re-interred after a brief period of admiration.

In the meantime Starlight was trotting unnoticed towards the den, nor did she see him till he had gained the very entrance. Then, straight as an arrow, snarling and bristling, she rushed to intercept him, and Starlight, seeing her coming, rolled on his back, his legs aspiring limply skyward in an attitude of utter surrender. Jess pounced upon him, snarling viciously, but as he meekly licked her muzzle her snaps turned to caresses, and they fondled each other in the pale morning light.

Presently Jess went into the den, to reappear with a whimpering, squirming cub, which she placed in the sand at the mouth of the den, then standing over it, snarled at Starlight. Yes, she snarled, but all the time her stump was wagging frenziedly, and, oh, the triumph in her eyes! As for Starlight, he began to belly up, his chin upon the sand, scraping his head this way and that, sniffing and snorting, ears tremendously cocked and tail wagging frantically. He looked at Jess and sniffed and whined, then the temptation proved too strong for him; he came grovelling up and sniffed the extreme tip of the wolfling's tail. And Jess let him—let him sniff the squirming mite from one end of its little pudding body to the other, and thereafter much of her jealousy was gone.

The creek from the canyon mouth widened out across the prairie to the point at which it joined the lovely Silvertrail, and the wolves, in their coming and going, habitually followed the margin of this creek on their way to the Prairie End Ranch or the prairie-dog cities that lay in the great, grey dimness beyond. Everywhere were their tracks—the tracks of one huge wolf whose mile-eating strides lined the drifts in never-ending procession, the tracks of one little she-wolf who every few paces nursed her right forefoot. Wells knew many things concerning these tracks. He knew that those of the dog wolf led always in passing to a certain sandy bank, for Starlight, too, had his secret caches. His, however, were less of a utility order

than were his wife's—in fact, they were more by way of being museums. In this one under the bank he had stored away an old dog collar, a bit of a larrigan, and several similar oddments, including one of the wolfer's bait traps between the jaws of which still lingered the mortal remains of a jack—or rather, those remains of the jack which had proved themselves immortal. Also, there was a very smelly lobster tin with a gorgeous red label.

Almost nightly Starlight visited this cache, and always he was adding to it or taking from it. The articles mentioned he evidently regarded as star turns, for they were permanently there, but in passing Starlight would pick up one of the minor treasures and trot away with it between his jaws, presently to exchange it for some other item found, which in due course was exchanged again, the last article carried being restored to the cache for future reference. Often this curious habit of the wolf had puzzled Wells, more especially as he was unable to account for it or to profit by it, but one dawn, watching Starlight return and deposit something in his cache, an idea occurred to his active mind.

Poisoned baits Wells had worked out. The wolves knew them, and would merely scatter dirt upon them. Traps they knew, too, and could scent them from afar, but hitherto all the wolfer's trapping had been done in the dead of winter, when the only thing which will hide the scent of a trap from a wolf's nostrils simply did not exist. That thing was running water, which to-day seamed every hillside with silver ribbons.

Wolfer Wells went to the creek margin, following by the bank opposite the one along which Starlight came and went, and fifty yards above the black wolf's cache he set, in the very centre of the creek, a Number $4\frac{1}{2}$ Newhouse trap. And, having set it, he built over the murderous jaw a small island of moss, then on the bank of the creek by which he had come he carelessly dropped a scintillating tobacco tin.

The sunset over the Silvertrail buttes is a thing of glory at any time of the year, for it is then that the buttes stand out in tier upon tier of jagged purple teeth, till the far-off ridges melt in a haze of blended colour indescribably wonderful. It is then that the valley uplands melt into golden haze, seeming so vast and beautiful, so

vague and infinite, that one wonders why nature has been so lavish here and so sparing in her gifts to other lands. Then there is the silence—the silence of this golden hour, which is perhaps most wonderful of all, for in it lies the spirit of the buttes, in it their solitary grandeur finds mysterious utterance. And if utterance be voice, then the silence is the voice of the buttes, the voice which calls men back to them across a world of wandering.

That hour of sundown found Jess and Starlight lying upon the lofty shelf by the mouth of their den, overlooking the infinite Silver-trail and the life that moved thereby. Two of the cubs lay between their mother's forepaws, for that day she had brought each of them out in turn to sprawl in the sun while she licked and fondled them, and while Starlight sniffed respectfully. But with the first breath of the coming night she carried them quickly in, and a few minutes later she and Starlight were padding silently down the canyon, crossing and re-crossing the creek to break their scent line.

In the golden haze of the prairie edge they separated, Starlight taking his old familiar route, Jess ranging to the right, both ready to close in should anything of interest move between. Starlight saw the shining tin on the opposite bank as it caught and threw back the last golden glimmer—stood with ears cocked and stared long and thoughtfully. As he moved the light vanished, then appeared again; which was mysterious, and in his striving for knowledge a wolf cannot pass by anything that appeals to his sense of mystery—especially when the scent of man is in the air. Starlight was a shade reluctant to cross the creek, for he hated to wet his feet unnecessarily, but here was a mossy island, conveniently placed, and he leaped for it.

Ping! That was all! A malicious, slashing "ping," as four hundred pounds of pent-up force closed upon Starlight's left forepaw; closed and held ere his other paws could touch the spring plate. He fell heavily and rose dripping, but though a stunning pain was upon him he uttered no sound. For fully ten seconds he stood motionless, then he raised the trap clear of the water and dragged it with its heavy anchor to the bank of the stream. This he mounted, but the three-pronged anchor bit into solid ground, and he was held.

Starlight did not struggle and spend his strength, as any ordinary

wolf might have done, but for the space of five minutes he stood absolutely still, apparently thinking. Then Jess came padding up, a ghost in the purple gloom, knowing in that mysterious way animals have of knowing things that something was amiss with her lord. Three times she circled round him, or, rather, round the trap, then she fell in a fury upon it, upon the chain, upon the three-pronged anchor, teaching each in turn what it was up against. But Starlight was still a prisoner, so she fell to thinking. Clearly the trap was the chief offender, so she began to scoop sand over it, to cover it from end to end with minute care, till Starlight himself was buried to the knees. But when she bade him "come" the trap rose and followed, at which Jess again fell upon it, in a whimpering agony of distress, striving in vain to tear the jaws apart.

This paroxysm passed, and she fell to gnawing—not the trap or the chain, but Starlight's leg. She gnawed it below the point at which it was held, gnawed it close up under the jaws, till merely a stump was left imprisoned.

If Starlight felt anything during this slow and grinding amputation he showed no sign, save that he closed his eyes and panted, but it is probable that the limb was cold and dead below the imprisoned joint. His left forepaw was gone, but still he remained a prisoner, held by the dripping stump, so that it occurred to him at last to bestir himself and endeavour to escape. He seized the great trap in his fangs and pulled, when click—the blunt jaws snapped together as the stump slipped from between them, snapped and held on—nothing!

When Wolfer Wells came next morning he read the signs all round, and found on the ground a huge black paw. "Blame little vixen gnawed him loose!" he growled, and now it was his turn to do something. He knew that the big wolf was sadly maimed and would be weak and sick for many days to come, denning up in the canyon, no doubt, along with the dam and her cubs. He knew, too, that Starlight, sick and disabled though he might be, would stand and fight for his cubs should their den, though inaccessible to man, be raided by some foe that could follow them by scent. In other words, the maiming of Starlight rendered it practicable to hunt him out with hounds—a process which hitherto would have been costly

besides being futile—but there was need to do it now, while the sickness of his wound was still upon the wolf.

The wolfer had at Trail End Ranch two extraordinary monstrosities of the canine race he kept for running wolves. Each had, in its composition, a visible trace of mottled dane, mastiff, Russian wolfhound, and quite a smattering of bulldog. There was also a little foxhound to improve their wind, but perhaps the union was made complete by a pinch of genuine Alaska wolf, hailing, no doubt, through malemute or husky veins—this to harden their paws. In fact, they were the most perfectly monstrous mongrels the ingenuity of man and the blood of the canine world could bring into being, but as wolfhounds they possessed no blemish. Each had killed in its time, singly and in open combat, its normal timber wolf. But Starlight was not normal, and for this reason Wells, who loved his dogs, had refrained from showing them the black wolf's trail.

That afternoon Starlight lay belly deep in the cool waters of the creek near their den, nursing his bruised and mangled stump. He was red-eyed and shivering, but suddenly a sound far below brought him to his feet with ears cocked. It was a full-throated, bellowing bay that filled the whole canyon with ghostly echoes, then it was uttered again and again, coming towards him. He glanced up at Jess, who stood at the den mouth bristling and anxious-eyed, and by that glance they seemed to come to an understanding.

Whether the thing that Starlight did next was purposely planned, or whether he did it merely to relieve his coat of its weight of water, I cannot say, but for it he had later to thank his lucky star. Mounting the bank he deliberately rolled in the fine dry sand, rolled and grovelled in it till his hair was thickly charged with clinging, cutting grains, then he set off down the canyon to meet and intercept the coming danger, while Jess stood in readiness to guard the shelf should he be overwhelmed.

The valley now was filled with bellowing echoes, and as he went to face that awful sound Starlight let forth a roar, which the man below heard and understood.

Nearer and nearer came the hounds, crossing and re-crossing the creek, losing the scent many times, but unerringly following the general trend of it up towards the den. Between two great boulders

that barred the way, with a shelf in front of him which the hounds would be forced to mount ere they could clear the passage, stood Starlight.

He was silent now, but he watched with fixed intentness. Terrible and forbidding he stood, head half lowered, fangs exposed, yet there was something lacking in the pose of this awful fighting machine. Normally he would have stood with forelegs wide apart, his broad front braced to meet the shock of impact and repel it, but now he stood with one paw raised, unstable, insecure, lacking that vital weapon of the fighting wolf, the ability to meet an attack broadside and rebound with lightning chop and slash. Yet his courage never wavered.

Up came the hounds, bounding from rock to rock, from shelf to shelf, their great jaws wide apart, their savage eyes aflame with the desire to kill. They saw the wolf and came on side by side, heads lowered now and in silence. They paused at the foot of the shelf, glaring up, then one of them leaped, cleared the six-foot span at a bound, and landed alongside Starlight.

There was a snap, a roar, and Starlight revolved as though on a pivot. He met the charge broadside, but was thrown, though as he fell he struck the hound a mighty sweep across the eyes with his bushy tail. This was merely to cause a diversion while he gained his feet, and cause a diversion it surely did, for Starlight's tail was thickly charged with cutting dust. The hound drew back, surprised, momentarily blinded, and Starlight was upon it. Chop, slash, thud went those awful jaws, and two hundred pounds of bone and muscle crashed backward over the shelf the way it had come.

But now the second hound had leaped and landed, but it, too, was met by a whirling sandblast and a sidelong slash. Sheer weight alone saved it till the first hound was up again, standing beside its mate, pushing irresistibly forward while the wolf pinwheeled and snapped in the narrow space ahead. Starlight seemed scarcely to touch the hounds, yet as they stood awaiting an opening, crimson gashes began to appear across their faces, their necks, their broad and mottled fronts. Now and then one would dart forward, to be hurled back against its mate, grovelling, snarling, shaking the sand from its stinging eyes. For five seconds they remained thus, facing, as it were, a revolving disk of knife-blades, then they closed.

Starlight drew back, out into the open. He could no longer hold the narrow way, and a closed fight against such weight was the last thing he desired. The braver of the hounds leaped upon him, passed over him, and fell, for Starlight had bellied down with an upward slash. And as the hound fell it uttered a roar of pain, and rose nursing one crimson forepaw, which seemed to be twisted back to front. The other hound leaped ere Starlight could recover and fell upon him, but somehow the wolf's jaws were where his back should have been, and the hound's throat fell between them. Something ghastly happened in the twinkling of an eye—chop, slash, chop, but the wolf was flung a dozen paces as the last hound closed, half his shoulder between its mighty jaws.

This time the bulldog blood showed up, for the hound held on, worrying, shaking, waiting for its mate to come and lend a hand. The other hound came, slowly, coughing as it walked, caught the wolf by the mangled forestump, and hung back to tear him asunder.

It was not a pretty sight, this desperate stand of a brave and daring beast, barring the way to his home and little ones, but it



The two great hounds, skilled in fighting together, bore Starlight down

served to show that, strive as he may, man cannot produce from his domestic stock a fighting dog to equal the wild dog of the plains. Starlight was bested now, but he was disabled ere the fight began, and he had three times his weight against him. And so the two great hounds, skilled in fighting together, bore him down, and a minute or so later Starlight lay limp in the sand.

One of the hounds grovelled to the water's edge, and began to drink, but the other lay very still, breathing heavily. Presently the breathing ceased, and only the lap-lap of the drinking hound broke the awful quietude. At length he turned, prepared to tear the wolf asunder, but there behind him he saw, standing erect and braced, confident, terrible, the wolf that they had fought and bested!

The great hound seemed veritably to shrink. Back, back he crouched, heading for an opening of escape, but Starlight cut him off and forced him into a corner. Then the black wolf raised his muzzle to the sky and let forth the short, sharp, rally call, and the hound, looking up, saw the she-wolf floating down towards them. He uttered the snarl of a dog which knows it is lost, then closed with Starlight in a last desperate endeavour to break away.

Under the shelf of rock Starlight and Jess tore the great hound to ribbons, then scattered dirt upon his luckless remains, and Wolfer Wells, listening anxiously far below, knew that he would see his dogs no more. Yet he waited till the sundown lights changed from gold to crimson, till night fell with the silence of the canyon still unbroken, then he went his way heavy-hearted, for he had loved his dogs.

That night Starlight and Jess carried their cubs by narrow shelves, along which no hound could force a passage, skirted black and yawning pits, by which no human foot can ever tread, till at dawn on a sunny shelf, a thousand feet above the murmuring creek, they made their nursery den.

Yet ere a month was passed the sands of the Silvertrail told Wolfer Wells that the great black wolf and his mate had ceased to hunt this range. Perhaps they had journeyed westward to that wild belt which man has yet to conquer, for a wolf that is maimed cannot hope to hold its own in a land of many foes. So Wolfer Wells, too, packed his bags and traps, and minus his dogs beat out for far-off Colorado.

On the Eaves of the White World

AMIDST the immensity of a glare which human eyes could not have endured for more than a few seconds, Safaid and his mate were watching. At this season they were hunting the lower slopes, a mere ten thousand feet up the Himalayan mountains; later, as the weather became warmer, they would turn for their hunting towards "the hills."

But even at that midway level, the scene which lay above and all around was dwarfed by its own immensity, and by the perfect clarity of the air. Some feature of the landscape which, had it been the Pennines or the Grampians, one would have judged to be five miles distant, was in this land fifty miles away, but the eyes of the two snow leopards were not to be deceived. They were beautiful eyes, the amber and lustrous green common to most of the great cats, but for that matter the snow leopards were beautiful in every way. The common leopard, the panther of the lower levels, is, indeed, beautiful among the cats. He is lithe and perfectly proportioned, but there is something baleful about him. His very cut proclaims him a killer and a marauder. There is the weasel touch in his gait, in his head, in his every aspect towards the world, but not so the snow leopard. In point of size they were equal to good moderate samples of their cousins of the jungles, but they were incomparably more beautiful. As creatures of the snows, their coats were lighter, touched with snowy white fading to blue-grey, and ringed and mottled with lighter shades. Their tails were long, but it was their faces, mainly, their expressions, which stamped them as a kindred apart from the creatures which take a heavier toll of human life than the tiger. Killers they were, but surely more merciful killers, for their eyes, their general expressions, were of the cats of our firesides, rather than of the wild cats of the hills. "The snow leopard is never dangerous to man," say the text-books.

Well, the panther may be perfect among a perfect tribe. He is

the most beautifully proportioned of the cats, and these two snow panthers, Safaid and his mate, were just perfect panthers, with coats any king of mountain or jungle would have been proud to wear.

So they were watching. Up there, on the eaves of the roof of the world, the view was magnificent for eyes that could endure it. Snow, snow, vast distances of snow. Above them were the perpetual snows, to which the snow leopards rightly belonged. They rarely ventured below the snow-line. Below them to south and east, the mighty jungle spread its arms into the hills, like the tentacles of an octopus. That was the purple world. There were mighty ghauts, and dim recesses which the sun never reached. There was the hinterland, a region of stark trees, jambur, palas, bubul, and chor, intergrown with dwarf bamboo and thorn bushes, as though to shut north from south; and above that were broken slopes, where the timber grew smaller and smaller, till one reached the timber-line. Then another hinterland, which in the New World is called the barrens, and in the Old World the tundra, and above that and the perpetual snow-line, and higher still, we come to the habitat of the snow leopards, which of all creatures belong to the extreme heights.

But they are not alone there, or they could not live, and Safaid and his mate were watching. Well above the timber-line they saw Monaul, the hill pheasant, with the white patch on his back to bewilder the eye of the falcon when he flies, scratching a hole in the snow—a noble prize for any wild cat. But he was too far away, too uncertain, and Safaid's tail-tip merely twitched from side to side as he watched.

He saw a covey of snow partridges come hurtling over the ridge, two thousand feet above. They spread their wings and burred to left and right, then they dropped vertically down the cliff face, and vanished into the snows at the foot of it. Safaid looked at his mate, but she did not seem to have noticed them.

At all events, nothing would have induced her to hunt at this hour, for, as they were essentially creatures of the snows, so they were hunters of the open, and children of the night. At this hour they watched, and took the census of the range. Game was scattered and distances great, and every evening, before the sun went

down, their keen eyes told them which way they were to turn when darkness fell.

So, as though the goddess of the day had inserted an opaque slide in her lantern, and with delicate fingers was letting it down, the light began to fade. From the intense glare of earth and sky, the valleys and nullas were filled with purple. Immediately after that a rainbow shimmered over the depths below. The far-off peaks shone liquid gold, which seemed to trickle down their world-old faces, ironically to turn to dripping blood. Then the purple rose like a mist, and the mighty rainbow rose above it, till the fireplay ceased, and the sun was gone.

Had you looked at your hands they would have been crimson. Had you looked at your clothes they would have been saturated with the same fatal hue. But before you could raise your eyes, your hands were deathly green, your clothes were green, and you would have felt like a ghost walking in the glimmer of another world.

Meantime Safaid had seen something move over the skyline close to the cliff, five miles above them. At first he could not be sure until he had focused his eyes to the range, then he was certain. Sheep—mighty sheep! Not the little blue sheep, or mountain burrel, but something greater. Not even the kingly Marcor, with which even a leopard has to be cautious—or there would be no Marcor left—but this time the kings of the ranges, a Marco Polo ram with his following ewes, coming round the shoulder of the cliff, whence the snow partridges had come, and looking behind them.

Safaid marked them down, and looked again at his mate. Day-time was all but gone from the slopes. Their hunting hour had come.

For days past the great Isabellian bear had watched that little train of sheep, and seemingly they were not ignorant of her watching. They must have been familiar with a vast area of country, for they had made an immense circuit, seeking at each fall of darkness some recess of the crags to which old Isabel could not, or dare not, follow. It was characteristic of her, however, not to abandon the quest. Having set her stubborn heart upon those sheep, she was prepared to go hungry till she had achieved her purpose, ignoring easier game, such as the marmots, to which she was accustomed.

So that night the two white cats were not the only watchers. From across the slope, Isabel also marked down the Polos. She saw the big ram lead his train out across the cliff face, which was pillared and festooned with ice, making the way perilous even for nimble hoofs; then she saw the ram turn back, ascend to a higher point, and stand motionless, watching his back trail till the darkness closed.

Isabel knew that it would be useless to follow by the way they had taken, for always they went downwind to rest; so, making a wide circuit, the bear gained the brow of the cliff, and began to work her way down its broken face. Silently, from pawhold to pawhold she went, sometimes sliding on her haunches, for there were no stones or pebbles to loosen, since everything was sealed by the frost. Overhead the stars shone from a sky of ebony blackness, yet every feature of the glassy height was visible to the mountain bear, and now and then cold wafts of air told her where the Marcos were.

Presently she made them out not sixty feet below her. The ewes were lying in a sheltered bay, with steep rocks on three sides of them, and the old ram lay at the mouth of the bay twenty feet from them. None of them was sleeping. At times they shook their



Safaid and his mate were watching

heads, or turned to stretch a limb on their icy beds. From where he lay the ram could look down the giddy slope below. His nose was towards the way they had come, but constantly he turned his head in the opposite direction, and watched intently.

Isabel saw that her hour had come. She had merely to steal a little farther down, then drop from the rocks straight on the back of the nearest ewe.

A drop of twenty feet was nothing to her, and certainly the ewe would know little about it. Her spine would be crushed, her neck broken, in the twinkling of an eye, then if the ram turned, Isabel would rear up, her back to the rocks, her arms outflung, ready to meet the owner of those mighty horns. So down Isabel crept, certain now that her time had come to strike.

The snow leopards did not hurry. They mounted to the point at which the sheep had crossed the skyline, and daintily sniffed their tracks in the snow. For a time they seemed undecided how to act, for these magnificent creatures were not burral—a fine beast enough, but easy prey for a snow leopard compared with the king of all wild sheep, the Marco. They could afford to make no error with a ram like that, nimble as ibex, brave as a lion, and withal the weight of a full-grown tiger. They would leave the ram alone—it was the ewes they were after. If they struck down a ewe, the ram might turn and boldly face them, but he would be sure of his foothold before he charged. Meantime the other ewes would be bidding him to follow them, calling him to come right away from the awful place, and he would have his choice—a dead ewe and a deadly fight, or get out and make the best of the inevitable. Safaid knew which he would choose when it came to the issue.

The snow leopards hunted by strategy, and they hunted together. In that they had an immense pull over the old bear, and now they followed up the trail of the wild sheep, still daintily sniffing the snow, their long tails switching silently from side to side. Thus they came to the place at which the Marcos had taken to the cliff face. The game path along the cliff was familiar to them. It was

one of those cosmopolitan game paths which not only the Marcos, but also the blue sheep, the great Marcor goats, used when they came that way. They themselves had used it, and it was from this side that their intended quarry would expect attack.

The snow leopards glanced at each other, and evidently came to an understanding. The she leopard remained where she was, on the tracks of the sheep, while Safaid mounted swiftly. She watched him mount the snows towards the cliff edge till he disappeared, then she lay down, her ears twitching, staring into space. She licked her forepaws, waiting—waiting for him to get round to the other side, to take up his ambush at some point from which he could drop as the sheep passed below. It was her job to surprise them—to pounce on them if she could, but at any rate to drive them towards him. So twenty minutes passed, and then she rose.

Following the trail of the sheep along the ledges, she kept close to the rocks, walking with a swift and silken gait, pausing at intervals, her head hung low, staring fixedly ahead, alert as any cat could be.

Suddenly she stopped—froze in her tracks, one paw raised. She was under the shadow of a pillar of ice, a part of the shadow, a part of the ice itself. There, not twenty feet away, within reach of her spring, lay the old ram!

He was quite unaware of her proximity, for with the closing of the frost the air had become absolutely still. She could have bounded up and pinned him where he lay, but there, in that place, at the brink of the cliff, it would not have been wise. And it was not her game. It was the ewes she was after, and she did not want to hurry them.

For five minutes the leopard did not stir, then she uttered the softest of soft sighs. It was a ghostly sound, for one could not have judged how far away it came.

In an instant the ram was on his feet. He glanced along the shelf by the way they had come, and again there sounded that soft sigh. Clearly something was following them, and with one glance at his ewes, the old ram turned, moving silently and swiftly along the game ledge away from the waiting panther.

In a moment the ewes were clattering after him, and the snow



leopard saw her chance. She went for the last of them, overhauling it in two bounds ere it could leave the bay. She landed on its back, her paws about its throat, her terrible fangs closed and locked upon its neck, and she never even saw Isabel, the watching bear.

But she—the bear—had seen! She was indeed on the point of falling from the rocks above on to that very ewe when the ram gave the alarm and all of them rose. Clutching a last departing chance, Isabel dropped. She struck the ground where the ewe had been a fraction of a second ago, then she saw the panther seize her prize.

There is no love lost between the bears and the panthers, and the whole affair was unfortunate. This hated cat had spoilt her hunting, stolen her quarry as she was in the act of striking, and now was her chance to strike again, with deadly enmity behind the blow. She

reared up on her hind legs and made a frog-like bound. One great arm was flung outwards, and the whole weight of her charge with all her strength behind it, caught sheep and cat together.

They had no chance. They were lifted bodily into the air and swept over the edge into space. The cat must have been stunned by the blow, for she uttered never a sound. The sheep was already dead. Isabel heard them strike a hundred feet below, then roll and strike again immensely further down. For a matter of ten seconds they went down and down, then came the echoes, and finally silence.

Old Isabel was satisfied. Good luck had favoured her after all. She had not only bagged her prize, but a hated leopard with it. They would not stir from the point at which they lay, for both were very dead. Not even a leopard can fall three hundred feet, striking and spinning, yet arrive at the bottom with a kick left. No, this was her night!

One must not delay in claiming one's kill, or another may be found in possession of it, so Isabel went hurriedly down, using the game path by which the sheep had come, then round to the foot.

There she found them. They lay a few yards apart, crumpled and motionless, at the foot of a glassy slope down which they had finally slid till they reached the softer snow. Isabel sniffed one, then the other. She preferred sheep to begin with, but neither would be wasted. This unexpected haul would keep her going comfortably for a week or more.

So old Isabel was about to begin her meal, when she saw something move a few yards to the left of her. She snarled as she turned



There was something accusing in that crouching death

her head, and the snarl went on, for there, calmly surveying her, was the Marco ram!

His beautiful head was up, his immense horns sharply outlined against the sky. He stood quite still, but there was something terrible and accusing in the kingly presence. "That is one of my ewes you have killed!" he might have said.

Then old Isabel's snarls rose almost to a scream, for on the other side of her also, not thirty feet away, something had moved, a slim grey outline, which had stolen up like a ghost, and was standing now with head low, fangs exposed, drawn and ready to pounce. There was something accusing in that crouching death. "That is my mate you have killed!" it seemed to say.

Isabel was not ignorant of the ways of panthers, and in any case the wild folk can read each other's meanings instantly. This panther meant to fight. It had followed her here for that purpose, and Isabel knew the reason why. That dead panther, lying there, was the reason why. She had slain another mighty hunter!

The killing of the sheep was as nothing. Sheep were her natural prey. She could deal with the ram in time, but the panther was another thing. So for the moment she forgot the sheep and reared up, coughing and snarling, saliva dripping from her yellow fangs, to meet Safaid, the more terrible of the two.

Safaid crouched and held her. Not a sound came from the beautiful white leopard, but by his eyes he said: "This is to be a fight to a finish."

Yes, a fight to a finish. You know what that means, Isabel, and so do I. Nature never meant that the bear and the leopard should meet under circumstances such as these. It is entirely regrettable, but there is no way out of it. It means—not that one of us is to die, either you or me, but that both of us are to die! It is not a matter of victory for the one, but of defeat for both of us—if death can be counted as defeat. There are some who think that the mighty can fight out their differences, but there is no such thing. Warfare among the mighty never settled anything. Both pay for it, but there is no victory, no settlement. It is merely the price of blood for blood, and the difference remains to be settled in other ways, or to go on for all time. You, Isabel, know as well as I do

that this means death for you and me—not to-night, here at this place, but to creep away bleeding from the bloody conflict, to die of our wounds. And the world-old hatred will just go on between my children and your children, bloody and bitter and useless to the end.

So Safaid crouched to spring, and Isabel, with gorilla arms outflung, waited to meet him, when from the opposite direction came a battering-ram of bone and muscle, five hundred pounds, head down, headlong over the snow.

Isabel had no time to turn. She rose on her hind legs to leap aside, still facing the leopard, but Marco Polo got her, low on the spine, and the sound of it was terrible to hear.

The great bear's snarling ceased with a click in her throat. She went over sideways, her paws clutching impotently at the empty air. She was silent now, and in that silence was defeat, the inevitable outcome of warfare, since there can be no victory.

Isabel lay there, clutching the snow with her forepaws, panting heavily. Once she tried to rise, but her hind legs were outspread behind her, and would not follow. Her head sank. Her breathing ceased. She was dead.

Twenty feet above the Marco Polo, with head magnificently aloft, stood and looked at her. Twenty feet to the right of him the snow leopard also looked, but the fire was gone from his eyes. He knew that the scene was ended. There is no hatred for the dead. Then the ram and the leopard looked at each other. There was no fear, no enmity in that look, and even as their eyes met, each looked back again at the bear.

Away in the background sounded the commanding whistle of an ewe. The ram hesitated, glancing quickly from the dead bear to the living panther. Fear came into his eyes, and he turned and bounded away.

So the snow leopard, alone, went over and quietly sniffed the one who might have called him. From end to end he sniffed her, from her pink nose to the tip of her long tail. He raised his head and looked down into the great purple quietude below, but he did not look at the other two. Then he stole silently away—never to return to that place.

Tembo and the Camera Man

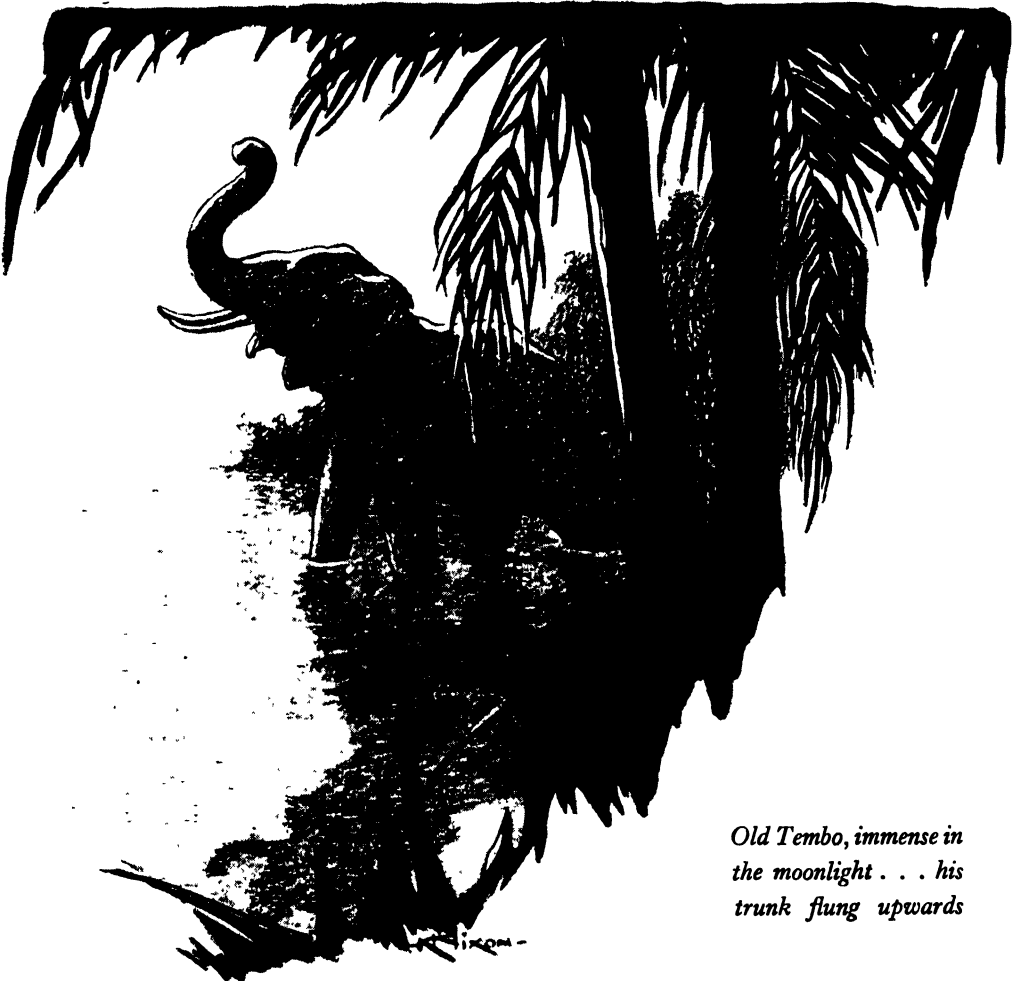
IT had taken long days of never-ending patience, accompanied by risks few men would take—disappointments, too, when it seemed that success was near, and no small degree of physical endurance. Yet out there, in the elephant jungles, with only an old native bearer as companion, life just goes on. For the most part Basil Clair had worked alone, wearing a red scarf round his neck that the elephants would know him. He had not avoided being seen—rather he had taken care that they should see him, and know him by the red cloth. He had stuck to one herd. When they moved he had moved with them. He had not hurried the process, for had he stampeded them he would have lost them for good. At first they had seen him far off, dallying in the offing about his own affairs. He had called to them and sung to them, so that they would get to know his voice. He had never carried a rifle, for the old elephants knew what rifles were. They had paid no heed to the big automatic strapped to his hip, a dangerous weapon for an elephant in any case, though Basil knew how to use it.

Meantime his bearer had hunted for their grub, and somehow they had lived. In less than five weeks Basil could sometimes approach within forty yards of the herd, singing the strange little high-pitched Kaffir song he always sang to them. Not till then did he begin to take his camera, and at first they did not like it. Soon, however, they got used to that too.

Sometimes the great master bull would stand quite still, flapping his great ears, when Basil drew too near, but Basil would ignore him, still singing his song, and perhaps whittling a bamboo with his hunting knife. Indifferently, coolly, he would walk this way and that, till the old bull got tired of it and relaxed his rigid pose. *He* did not want to fight in any case, and clearly the persistent human with the red cloth had no thought of it. He had proved himself harmless and friendly, and so by degrees the elephants had

come to regard him as part of the landscape. He could quite easily have gone in and patted the little calves, but it was unwise to become too familiar.

Bazil was at heart a hunter, or he would not have been there. At first it was merely interest which led him out, coupled with the necessity of earning a living. But his interest in these great folk of the African jungle soon grew into a real regard for them, as he learnt more and yet more about them. Shut off from his fellow men and living with the elephants, he came to know them as individuals of temperament, with their own cares and affections.



*Old Tembo, immense in
the moonlight . . . his
trunk flung upwards*

All those weeks they were his daily companions, and duly his regard for them turned into something deeper. He came to love old Tembo, the mighty bull, old Sally, his favourite mate, Aunt Matilda and the rest, but particularly two little podgy calves, who seemed so small among the rest, and were so guarded and cared for by every member of the herd. Perhaps this sense did more than anything to conquer their distrust in him, for there was patient affection in his voice when he spoke to them and coaxed them, and even wild animals quickly understand—particularly elephants.

Bazil would truly have sorrowed had any misfortune befallen one of the herd. Why not? They were his daily friends and companions. Similarly, he would gladly have fought side by side with them in their defence, but of course they would not have understood. Yet—*would* they, if the time came? He doubted it, yet each day taught him something new about these timid and gentle monsters.

Meantime his Elephant Book was going on. It would penetrate deeper into the lives of the African elephant than a rifle hunter could ever penetrate. Had he not been their friend rather than their foe? The photographs and films for his elephant lecture would be the greatest and most vivid the world had ever seen.

Of course he would have to go back some day. It was for that purpose that he was here, yet he rather dreaded the day. He was becoming afraid of returning to the glare of crowded streets, of facing crowded halls, even of meeting his old friends in the Club. Life for them would have gone on just as usual. Probably they would hardly realize that he had been away. They would ask him to have a sherry, and demand what he had been doing all this time. Nothing much had happened to them since last he saw them. The same games of billiards and rounds of golf, and what not, but he—he had seen so much and lived in another world. They would not understand, and he could never tell them.

Take to-night, for instance. Bazil lay in the lush jungle grass, his face and hands smeared with a poisonous concoction to keep off the flies, around him the weird noises of the forest night, but he was supremely happy. And what a picture to delight the world if only his camera would take photos after nightfall—old Tembo, immense

in the moonlight, spraying his mud-caked hide, his trunk flung upwards, his great tusks reflecting the silver glimmer!

By now Basil had conquered. He was beginning to think himself one of the herd. Brilliantly the waters shone, the dark forest foliage black as ink against the deep blue sky. Away behind Tembo the others of the herd were wallowing and grunting, and now and then a flash of silver in the shadows showed where one of them had rolled. A night eagle screamed shrilly. Far away sounded the wail of a hunting dog. These were the sounds Basil had come to love.

"Tembo!" he cried. "Come here, you old rogue! You'll jolly well get wet if you don't look out."

Old Tembo nodded his big head up and down. He went on squirting water this way and that, and the silver spray of it fell and scintillated. Then suddenly he wheeled, and came wallowing towards the hidden human, his trunk playfully raised, uttering a deep grunting noise as he ran. For you or me it would have been a terrifying moment, but Basil merely threw something into the water, which the old elephant took up in his trunk, and transferred to his mouth.

"Come no nearer!" ordered Basil in a stern voice. "I believe, if I tried, I could ride round the jungle astride your neck, but I am not going to try, Tembo! We know each other well enough already, and you must keep your distance. Now go."

The man rose and clapped his hands, and the old elephant swung peacefully away, flapping his great ears, and still munching the corn cake, sickly sweet with molasses, which Basil had tossed to him.

Basil's record was complete. He knew that it was time to employ his bearers for the great return trek across country, but he did not want to go. Yet he must go, or the rains would catch him. His motor-van, propped up on logs to prevent its sinking, was eaten to rags by the ants, and rotting through with rust. Kobo, his companion, was wearying of the long safari. Basil must bid farewell to Tembo and the rest, but the breakaway was difficult. Yet the longer he stayed the more difficult it would become. Truly he

longed for white man's grub, and his clothes were done, his films were used up, his book and his projected lecture were as complete as he could make them. Yes, he must go now!

He was a sentimental fool, perhaps, yet one can partly understand. He would never see old Tembo again, and he wanted to announce that he was going. He wanted to say good-bye, and to tell them that he would think of them always in the sunshine of his thoughts. They would not understand, of course, and it was only to satisfy some foolish sentiment of his own soul.

Such a different world lay ahead of him. The long trek across the thirsty veldt, then the railhead, and good-bye to Kobo and the regions he loved. Good-bye to all the wild folk of this great hinterland. After that noise—human companionship, perhaps, yet noise! No more silent jungle nights—only thoughts of old Tembo standing there in the moonlight, and wonders as to what he and his herd were doing now. Then dockyards, steamers, Customs, dressing for dinner, games of bridge, ladies who loved pretty clothes, men who could not understand—would never try to understand!

London again. The hall-porter would say: "Your room is number thirteen, sir. I always remember you like the unlucky number, sir. Porter, take Colonel Clair's luggage up to number thirteen."

Colonel Clair! Why shouldn't they call him "Bwana," and be done with it?

Yet he *must go back*! Kobo, indeed, was already eagerly loading up the old van, tearing off the tattered upholstery and substituting rushes.

"We will start to-morrow," called Bazil. "Have everything ready, Kobo." Then, as usual, he went out alone.

He went to the place where he knew the herd would be, but he found them standing about in odd corners among the heavy timber, flapping their ears, the cows obviously anxious for the calves, for they kept running their trunks down the spines of the little ones, and herding them in, under the shelter of their bodies. Tembo was nowhere to be seen, and the red blood rose to the roots of Bazil's hair as he conceived in their uneasiness the trespass of another white



The great trunk encircled Basil's body and he was raised high into the air

man. Had some tusk hunter come along and slain old Tembo?—no, or the herd would not be here. He read by their movements that it was not man who had disturbed them, or their trunks would have gone up when he himself approached—on the upwind side of them, as he always did. No, it was not man, but an enemy of another kind which led to this watchfulness; but where was Tembo!

Basil took the big automatic from its holster, checked it over,

and returned it. He had come to say good-bye to the herd, but had the Fates chosen that to-day he should fight for them, stand beside them, guard them from a foe? If so, would they understand?

He doubted it. Gratitude towards man is a great deal to ask of a wild animal, and in the heat of the moment they would be as likely to attack him as their real foe. He must keep awake, and if the moment came he must shoot to kill. He must be sure of that, for it was just like the goddess of the jungle to give him so much rope, then net him to-day, his last day, when he came to say good-bye!

Then suddenly there was a crash in the foliage not far off, and the trumpeting of a great bull elephant. It was not the trumpeting of Tembo, whose voice Basil knew so well, but of another bull, a stranger to him. It was coming through the jungle towards him,



There was a crash of tusks and a thud of mighty bodies

and he wheeled round tense and ready. His hand was on his holster—an ankle shot, then another, and he could thank his stars if he could dodge in time. For in that moment he had realized that here was an old rogue bull, intent on driving Tembo out, when he would take possession of the herd, herd the cows ahead of him, probably trample down the calves—the worst enemy of the elephant kind, a rogue of their own race!

But, as Basil turned, he became aware of a great black shape, towering and immense, which had stolen through the timber on the other side. One glance, and he knew that it was Tembo—Tembo with trunk raised, standing above him, ready to strike him down, as he knew would be the case if he interfered too far. There was no time to use the automatic, no time to act. He could only cry out: “Tembo—Tembo!” and even as the words left his lips the great trunk encircled his body, and he was raised—raised, high into the air, swung giddily upwards, with the fear of death at his heart. “Tembo—Tembo!”

Poised giddily aloft, Basil gripped a branch, and clung to it. He felt the grip about his body relax, and he hung there. At the topmost reach of the mighty bull he clung, unharmed, looking down!

There was a crash of tusks, and a thud of mighty bodies—Tembo and a great black bull, shoulder to shoulder, their trunks interlocked, striving for supremacy. He himself had been whipped from the ground in the ace of time, and understanding came to him. There, directly below, Tembo fought for possession of the herd, which was his, against the raiding despot, who had borne down upon him!

Basil watched. It was the greatest scene of his life, these mammoths of the jungle, striving for supremacy, now on their knees, crashing down the trees and clearing the undergrowth, each striving for that deadly upward slash of the tusks, each warding off the other.

Tembo was clearly outmatched by the older bull, and the fight hung in the balance. This could not be! Tembo had been his friend. Tembo must win! He had learnt from Tembo more than he had ever dreamed, and now Tembo stood on the point of defeat!

Basil drew his big automatic. An ankle shot would settle the

fight, yet—was it sporting? He could not bring his mind to decide. Such fights as this had occurred through the dawns of time, for the supremacy of the herds. It was a fair fight, head to head and tusk to tusk, and was it quite a white man's game to strike from outside the ropes?

He could not bring himself to do it. Tembo, for some strange reason, had saved Basil's life. Tembo whom he knew. Was he now to see him driven out, and the peaceful life of the herd destroyed—this last day?

Twice he raised the deadly automatic, and twice he put it down. After all this was the jungle. He could have shot scores of elephants had he chosen, but he had shot none. Why not shoot one now? It mattered nothing to anyone. Why not forget the fight, and help old Tembo, whom he loved? He raised the pistol again, but the fight veered round. The raider was on his knees now, Tembo above. A scream came from the outlaw bull as with desperate strength he strove to throw Tembo aside. A moment they remained interlocked, then Basil saw that one of Tembo's tusks was in the other's mouth, and had penetrated upwards. The fight was over!

Tembo tore himself free, then with trunk aloft he called to his herd mates, and with them crashed away into the jungle, their trunks upraised to shield the calves.

Then, not till then, the automatic spoke—once, twice, thrice, for on his knees, blood gushing from his mouth, stood the sorely wounded bull, whose sufferings anyone who loved the elephants had to conclude.

"A wonderful story, wonderfully illustrated," said Basil's agent, as they sat in the little upstairs office somewhere off the Strand. "To you it is all so natural and familiar and ordinary, that it must be hard to understand what our public can swallow?"

"You mean?" queried Basil, his mind wandering back into the forests.

"I mean that with a great work like this, we cannot risk your being accused of drawing the long bow."

Basil sighed. "I have already cut out more than half!" he said.

"The greatest story of all I have not told at all, but I suppose we must delete some of the simpler scenes?"

The agent nodded. "And put in the risks, the perils, the hair-breadth escapes you must have had in getting such a series as this," he advised.

Bazil rose wearily. "There was none," he answered. "I was then among a people I understood."

Iron-Hoof, the Vengeful

IRON-HOOF stood stock still, staring ahead of him. He did not appear to be looking at anything in particular, yet in his very stillness there was a preparedness and alertness. Twenty yards or so behind him was his little herd, not more than a dozen of them, including two small and fidgety foals. All save the foals were motionless, save for the swishing of their tails, for they were watching Iron-Hoof, their leader.

It is strange how the zebras often do this—just stand and watch and wait, as though frozen to the ground! They may have seen a grass stem move unaccountably, or a leaf stirred by the wind, or a bird may have alighted and passed from view—they just stand and stare! Perhaps they know that they are never more invisible than when stock still. This is true of most wild creatures of most lands, but particularly of the wild striped horses of the open bush-veldt. The tall grass, the parched and stunted scrub, the rocks and stones which strew the earth, are just a patchwork of stripes and glare under the blazing sun, and the striped wild horses fit into the glare and shadow, till they move.

Well, one cannot turn and bolt at every movement of a grass stem, or there would be no rest in life, but one must discover what it was that moved—at least a zebra must! And among the wild and wary people of the plains, there are none more watchful and cautious than the Burchells zebras.

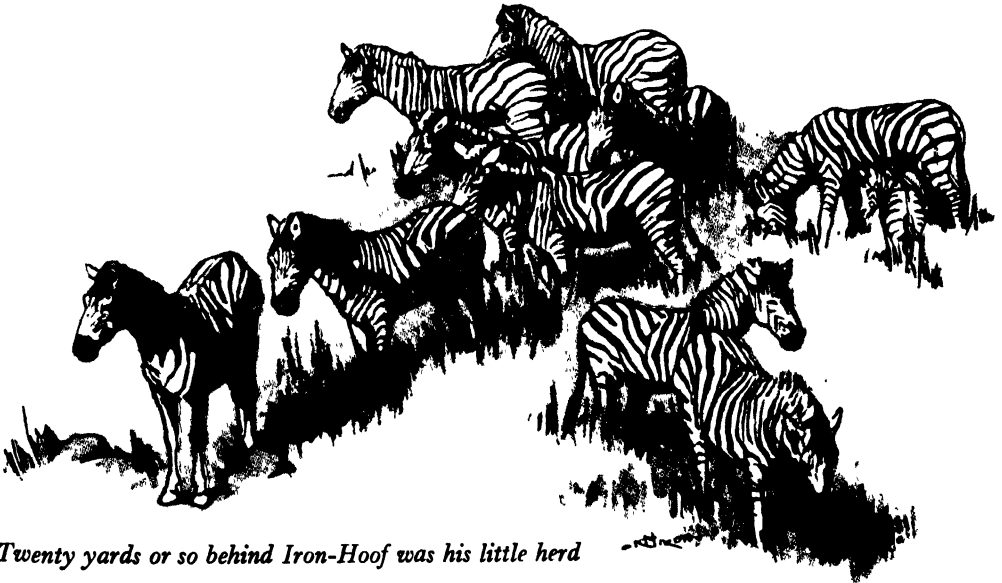
This was their favourite region—the wide, level plains, scattered thinly with scrub, grass-grown in patches, rocks here and there with open spaces, stone-scattered and hard. One can see what is coming in such a country, and if the need arises, one can travel fast. Over good going a trained hunter would have left Iron-Hoof and his herd behind, but good going was scarce in this land of theirs, and among the rocks and stones no horse on earth could have held them. Even the lion knew their speed, knew that if his first dash failed,

there was no overtaking them, yet were the bones of the zebra as durable as stone, they would be as numerous as stones throughout their thirsty home range.

For there is one weakness in the self-equipment of the zebras. Their ears, their eyes are wonderful, their speed and surefootedness superb, hardened and tempered by ages through which only the fittest have survived, yet here and there, over vast areas, the zebras are gone. Why is this? Not by the human safari, for many wild beasts have been hunted more, yet still outnumber them. Not through lack of speed or alertness, for we have seen that they are among the swiftest and the wariest, but by that eternal thirst of theirs, which ties them down to the regions of their foes.

It is at the water-hole that peril lurks. Do we not see the memory of it starting up in our own horses—the inherited fear of the drinking place? How he snorts and hesitates as we lead him to the water, and even as he drinks he throws back and swings aside at the faintest sound. We must not punish him when he does this! He cannot help it. It is an instinct at work far older than his period of slavery—when, in a distant world, his ancestors stole down to quench their thirsts in terror of their lives!

The horses, the world over, are the same. They must have



Twenty yards or so behind Iron-Hoof was his little herd

water, and while here in the veldt the many gazelles and antelopes can seek the sanctuary of the waterless areas, the striped wild horses are compelled to linger about the water-holes, where the great carnivora must also linger, and are ever watching. Thus in the dry season, when the eland seeks the timber, and lives on the paper-dry leaves, till his very flesh becomes fibrous and dry, the zebras are always on the move, driven often from water-hole to water-hole, seeking ever the peaceful corners, and rarely finding them.

By why was Iron-Hoof standing thus, so still and watchful? Over there was the drinking place, and all afternoon they had been grazing their way towards it. What the young stallion had seen was a brown, waving something, just above the grass tops. It had appeared and disappeared, then appeared again a little closer. There was no breeze to guide him. The dry air contained no scent. Now he saw it again, closer still! It flashed above the grass stems for the twinkling of an eye, but was gone ere he could focus his gaze upon it.

At last his rigid attitude relaxed. He went forward three paces to peer over the rocks, then he froze as before, but in deadly fear. For he had made a fateful error!

Perhaps the old lioness had thought he would do this. Perhaps she had traded upon the curiosity to which she knew his kind were prone. At all events it was an old trick—that sudden upward swish of the tail-tip where the grass grows long enough to hide all else. There she was, within a single bound of him, one paw upraised, waiting and ready, and as their eyes met she snarled a silent snarl.

Still Iron-Hoof did not stir. He knew that the twitching of a stripe would mean his doom. He was too close to avoid her charge. No four-footed thing on earth could have escaped her, for the charge of the lion is swifter than anything else on legs. The cheetah, the racehorse, the antelope, the greyhound, they in their order are the swiftest things when it comes to an all-out race, but the lion is incomparably swifter for the distance of his first few bounds. Were that not so he could not live on the open plains.

But Iron-Hoof knew that she would not charge so long as he stood his ground, staring at her. He could read that in her eyes. He longed to warn his herd mates, whom he dearly loved, yet one

sound from him and she would be on him. So the seconds passed, both of them motionless. He saw her mane rise slowly up, he saw her eyes flash from yellow to green, from green to red, yet he could but wait. What could happen, what *might* happen, he did not know! She was steadily gliding up to him, inch by inch, terrible to behold, then something *did* happen.

Behind him there sounded an awful roar, which shook the still, hot air. He heard the pounding of mighty paws, the terrified screaming of his herd mates, then the rumble of their hoofs as with kicking heels they got into their stride. He knew at once what had happened. Another monarch of the veldt had come up on the other side of them—her mate, perhaps! That was why she had shown her tail-tip, to hold their eyes while he crept up within charging distance. That was why the lioness had stolen in till they stood face to face, why she was still holding him! They were hunting together, she and he, and she was the ambush part of it!

So in a moment Iron-Hoof's herd was up to him, and bounding past him, but still he could not stir. The lioness saw her chance, and made a sidelong spring. One of the foals was under her, and its life went out in one short scream. Still Iron-Hoof did not stir, perhaps because he could not. He heard the lion pounding up behind him in great mile-eating bounds, but he did not even turn his head. Either he was frozen with terror, or his nerve was wonderful. Too wonderful, surely, to be true!

But the trick served well, for the lion behind him had eyes only for the bolting herd. He was straining every muscle to overtake them, and he had no eyes for the motionless one. Iron-Hoof felt the rush of his mighty body as he smote the earth not a dozen feet away. The lioness was already busy, and her mate went over her to fall, alas, on the second foal of the herd! Then Iron-Hoof wheeled and went pounding off by the way the lion had come.

They did not follow him—why should they? Each had made its kill, which was good hunting for them. They had triumphed by their wits, and for once Iron-Hoof had failed his herd, as the best of zebras must do now and then!

Perhaps that knowledge angered him, and gave him courage. He ran round in a circle, screaming shrilly, his head high in the

air, his eyes flaming. Soon he was on the heels of the others, streaming after them, and the mothers of the stricken foals heard him, and went back to meet him. They too were wild-eyed and savage, and away over there, where the thing had happened, they could see the lion and lioness dragging their prey under a bush, evidently in search of shade.

Yet they could do nothing. There could be no vengeance, and the foals, of course, were dead. It was merely a matter of forsaking this place and its evil memories as speedily as they could, and seeking pastures new.

The herd was united again. All were looking towards the scene of the tragedy, but the lions had ceased to heed them. Iron-Hoof took the lead, and away over the veldt they went, watchfully now, peering ahead, their gaping nostrils sifting the air at every stride.

Then suddenly Iron-Hoof stopped, and froze once more. His nostrils could not lie, for the scent of lion and of blood—the blood of his own kind, of his own herd, was hot in his senses. Just ahead there, a hundred yards ahead, another lion was hidden—perhaps more than one, but somehow the scent was different, and Iron-Hoof knew. The rest of the herd were snorting. The two bereaved mothers were still red-eyed



and furious. All of them knew what lay ahead, yet their leader went on—alone!

Iron-Hoof, are you mad? They bunched together, uttering their grunting, squalling cries to him, half neigh, half bray, yet on he went, steadily yard by yard, heedless of the warning of his herd. Had he not escaped death already by the width of a grass stem? Why go forward thus to invite it again? Yet on he went, into the grass patch from which the dread scent came; then suddenly he wheeled about and came trotting back. Iron-Hoof had seen!

He went back to his herd, and bade them follow him. Towards



*The lioness was steadily gliding
up to Iron-Hoof, inch by inch*

the grass patch he led them, but they veered off, screaming their terror. They would not follow him, so again Iron-Hoof returned. He drove them with tooth and heel ahead of him, on towards the cover where the unseen terror lay, but again they veered off, again he rounded them and punished them for disobedience. For it is a law of those who live in herds that they *must* follow their leader.

Yet why should they follow him thus to certain death? For all the laws, surely the law of life comes foremost? They were sweating fear, for they had already endured enough for one day. Why follow Iron-Hoof, when he was clearly mad? Even the bereaved mothers could see no sense in it.

Then behind them they heard that coughing roar, in time with the thump-thump-thump they knew so well. The lion and lioness had left their kill, and were charging them again—bearing down upon them at full speed. It is not usual for a lion to charge from over a mile away—not at least to charge a zebra, who has the heels of him even with thirty yards to spare, and it could have but one meaning. Iron-Hoof could have told them what it meant if the gift of speech were his, but perhaps they understood.

Now, if ever, they must obey their leader, and follow him where he led. There was at yet time to spare, for the little foals were gone, but time to spare is very little time where such as the lion and the zebra are concerned!

“Follow,” cried their leader. “Follow and keep close, and remember that our hoofs are weapons of iron!”

There was no disobeying now. Flank to flank they followed Iron-Hoof, pounding up the dust, while from their iron hoofs the loose stones flew and mingled with the dust. Into the grass patch and over it, their leader leading, till from under him rose a little spotted yellow cat, snarling over its shoulder, bounding before them, while behind them shuddered the savage cough-cough-cough of their mighty pursuers.

A cat, indeed, but one of royal blood, perhaps her only one, which she had left there, trusting to his body scent to guard him, unmindful for the savage love of other mothers, and perhaps of fathers, too, whose lives she held so lightly! A bounding, feeble lion cub, and behind him a herd of racing zebras, who loved each

other with all the clannish faith of those who live together in a land of many perils!

Could it have been otherwise? Vengeful hoofs trampled him into the dust, and behind the hoofs of the leader other hoofs, beating and pulping as they ran, till in the dry grass there was nothing left which even its mother could recognize as the bright-eyed little hopeful she had left!

Nothing could be done about it. The zebras were gone, and there the lioness must take it as she found it. He was innocent of all crime, but he would not long have remained innocent. Some zebra would pay for this, but some zebra would have paid in any case. Had not a thousand thousand paid already?—but such reasonings of justice did not enter the reckonings of the lioness. She merely carried her cub a yard or two, then she lay and looked at him.

Dusk was not far off. The wild dogs were already calling. There were many wild dogs of many kinds, the scavengers and gleaners of the bush veldt. To them all its people must fall some day, and it is perhaps a glorious thing to die innocent!

Someone must die for this, but it would not be one of Iron-Hoof's herd, who were still beating the blood from their hoofs as they headed for a distant range. Their leader had perhaps failed that day, yet he was still alive to lead his herd, and if he had failed he had also triumphed. A life for a life, the old, hollow, bitter ruling, yet it has prevailed through all time, and in the Wild, at any rate, must continue to prevail. How true it is of man himself we have only to ponder and understand.

In the Wake of the Fire Fiend

IN the wilderness there is one fear above all other fears which moulds the ways of weak and strong alike—the fear of Forest Fire! It is because of it that the calf or the fawn runs for the water at a warning from its mother, and proceeds to “sink” itself, only its nostrils above the surface. It is why the weak troop down to the mighty rivers when the sky becomes dimmed by smoke, there to remain, heedless of the raids of their living foes, till the sun is clear again. Many of them know not what they fear, but the fear is there, ingrained and deeply rooted, manifest in their daily lives and movements at all seasons. It is like the Wolf Fear in the regions of the north, and the Tiger Fear in the regions of the south, save that it is greater, for the wolf and the tiger shrink from it with a dread far older than the dread of man. Even Tembo the mighty, and Simba, the terrible, are its children. They cannot comprehend the Fire Fiend, or fight against it. Do we not see this fear in our own dogs—how at times they look at the starting flames, and timorously draw away, loving the fire, yet always distrustful of its movement? That is the dread of the Fire Fiend!

For several days the vast valley of the Heeas River had been burning—red patches here and there, gradually joining up, linking together, till it needed only a breeze to set the holocaust going. The breeze came one dawn, just the gentlest of zephyrs, such as so often fans the thirsty plains as the day awakes. But it was enough! Fire joined fire, till the furnace began to create a breeze of its own. Then away she went!

The breeze rose to a hurricane, and ere long a great horseshoe of fire, two hundred miles in width, was taking forest and veldt in its stride. It leapt great lakes and spread through the tree-tops of the dampest jungle, driving all wild life before it in the darkness of its smoke-screen.

There were many who fled for the hills, and who perished ere

they got there. There were some who hid in the water-holes, the leopard and the baboon, the hare and the civet, huddled side by side, heedless of each other in the face of so omnipotent a foe. Lucky were they if they survived the fumes. But of a thousand thousand terror-stricken fugitives, the main mass surged into the river swamps, there to hide in the lush green rhino grass, fearful of the crocodiles, which recognize no truce.

When the fire was past and the smoke began to clear, strange and incredible spectacles occurred. Truly the lion and lamb had lain side by side, and now as the great army came forth from the belts of rushes, they walked in peace—the hyena and the water buck, the leopard and the zebra, the lion and the hartebeest. Each was busy with its own affairs, for the air was still thick, terror still reigned, the heavier timber still smouldered. Around them was a vast desolation, nothing green or living within scores of miles, and somehow the wild folk know such things.

At yet there was no hunger, but hunger came, and chaos followed. Those with hoofs and horns or manes dare not leave the swamp grass for the desolation of burnt and waterless country. They came down to the edges to nibble what they could find, but Simba, the lion, was there, and Chui, the leopard, all those who live by killing, and who are not fleet for the great distances. They had crowded in by the ways of least resistance, heedless of to-morrow, and now to-morrow was here.

Murder and terror for the weak, while all the time the living horror of the pools snatched from the margins and carried his kill down to the murky depths, there to anchor it and kill again, when killing was so easy. Even the lion feared him; for the grass eaters' life soon became impossible. So in herds and strings and mighty companies, they took to the burnt desolation of the open plains, preferring to perish there in herds and strings and companies rather than submit to the living murder of the reed-beds.

Only Kiboko, of the lagoons, remained serene. For her (the mighty hippo) forest fire had no meaning. She could seek the deep waters, her beloved shelter was untouched, or rather, merely singed. She still had her tunnels through the reeds, a forest, cool and shady,

towering overhead. She did not fear the crocodile, nor even Simba as yet. Of all the great folk she was the least perturbed, because she had suffered least, and her hide was thick.

For Simba and Chui it was different. They loved the shady places, and would not leave the long strips of river swamp to cross the blackened deserts for other lands. Maybe their sense of smell told them that it meant a great journey, so they paraded the swamp lands, the lions fearful of their kind, the leopards cowering from the lions, for this was civil war. So the sun glared by day, and the big white moon looked down by night, and one prayed for a sky which would render rain, to make the fire-belt fertile again.

Timorously, yet hungrily, the young blesbok crept back to the edge of the swamp grass, and began feverishly to feed. Not many of his kind were left, and several times that day he had stolen in to snatch a mouthful, only to steal back into the open at the sound of approaching foe. Desperately hungry he was, and having begun to feed, he forgot his fears. He nibbled, he tore up long stems, and ate through them, swallowing roots as well. He seized another mouthful, eagerly swallowing and seizing more, but old Leather Back, the crocodile, had seen him, and was snaking up. Simba, the



The living horror of the pools

lion, had also seen him, and was creeping up from the other side. Assuredly, if ever a buck was doomed, we see him now, yet he ate steadily on, enjoying his meal, if ever a blesbok enjoyed a meal. For the laws of compensation are always at work.

Suddenly there was a zipp, and the blesbok was hurled high into the air. One saw him above the reeds, his white belly towards the sky. Old Leather Back had got in a good one with his tail, just as Simba crouched to leap!

That lion, too, was hungry, and having decided to leap, he carried it out. He knew well the lashing tail of the croc, so he leapt beyond it. He alighted on the shoulders of old Leather Back, tearing with fang and claw, but as well might he have attacked a tree to kill it.

The crocodile shuffled on towards the water, taking the lion with him, and at the edge he deliberately rolled, his terrible tail thrashing, his forelegs clutching, his jaws chopping like a stone-breaker. But Simba was too wise to be trapped. He leapt aside with a roar of hatred, aimed a double-fisted lightning dab at the face of the croc, then drew back from the deluge of spray as the reptile dived, his horned tail smiting the water with a crash.

Simba—the blesbok is yours! You have fairly vanquished old Leather Back, so you may take his kill. The lion went back and sniffed the antelope daintily, then suddenly it began to move—to glide towards the water. Simba placed one paw upon it to hold it down, but still it slid, while Simba stared in puzzled bewilderment, till he saw the nose of old Leather Back protruding from the water's edge. He aimed a terrific blow at it, but he might as well have hit a rock, so he gripped the blesbok with jaws and forepaws, and hung back, while Leather Back had it by the head.

There was an unpleasant cracking noise, and the blesbok came in two. Simba had one end, and old Leather Back the other. It was a fairly fair division, but it did not please Simba. He tossed his share behind him, and dashed knee-deep into the water, where a bloody swirl showed where old Leather Back had descended. In his fury Simba would have gone farther, but caution forbade it, and as he stood there, snarling, he saw swirls and ripples coming towards him on all sides, in response to the scent of blood. Therefore

he backed slowly out, snarlingly begrudging every foot, one paw ready to strike, and the blesbok for the moment forgotten.

No use trying to fight crocodiles. As well might one try to fight fire, for in their senseless ferocity they are utterly fearless. He hated them with a deadly hatred, but it simply was not worth while. So he turned angrily to snatch up his share of the kill, but it was gone!

Out in the open beyond the rushes, a lioness and her three full-grown cubs were fighting venomously for a few tattered remains of blesbok. Simba could hear them at it, and he knew that they had crept in behind him when he, like a fool, had turned his back to carry on his futile conversation with the crocs. Anyway, it was theirs now, and he must go hungry. It would be more than his life was worth to advance and argue the point against all four—disunited for the moment, but ready enough to unite against a common foe. They would have killed him and eaten him, for the lions of the reed wastes were down now to devouring each other's rank and fibrous flesh!

“Hyena! Eat Hyena! Who would eat Hyena!”

The great spotted dog, high in the shoulders, heavy of jowl, miserably cramped and knock-kneed in the hind legs, and withal hobbled and pig-like of gait, though few could have caught him, sang his unearthly death-song somewhere among the reeds. One would have thought that, at a time like this, he might have sense enough to curb his musical tendencies, yet it would seem that he simply *had* to advertise his ungainly presence.

But perhaps there was wisdom in his folly, for he had seen one of his own kind sneaking shamefully and secretly through the rushes. A tongue of fire must have caught her, for she was hideously burnt, and pestered by insects and leaches. “’Twas mercy bade her go,” but though she was one of his kind, she was not of his sex, so it was against the wild dog creed to rise and slay her. “Hyena! Eat Hyena! Who would eat Hyena!”

Simba drifted towards the call, for he understood hyena language. Normally he would have ignored the summons, knowing well the false alarms of the hyena kind, but to-night he was hungry.



Simba alighted on the shoulders of Old Leather Back

He uttered the moan of the hunting lion, and soon the mangy scavenger was beside him.

"Here—here!" yowled the spotted dog, and his great round eyes shone green and expressionless in the moonlight. He went on swiftly, and Simba followed, till the stricken one rose ahead, hunched and wretched, yet twisting and doubling like a wild boar, as she saw the lion. Simba was after her, and pinned her down in a dozen bounds. One stroke of his forepaw, and the misery of the smitten one was ended.

"Hyena! Dead Hyena! Here—here!" sang the songster, and the echoes came and went in ghastly cadences.

Yet Simba could not eat the black and sinuous flesh of the carrion feeder. One taste of blood and he drew away, shaking his massive head, and distastefully licking his whiskered jaws. Famine it might be—civil war and the blood of one's own kind, but not, as yet, hyena! He went off and left it, and the one which had called closed hungrily upon the lion's kill—one of his own kind, though not of his sex! Of such is famine.

The charge of the leopard is dazzlingly swift. He takes it so smoothly that he does not seem to move, yet in a moment he is there.

As a matter of fact, the hyena did not see him at all. He was too busily at work on his meanly gotten meal, and the leopard's arms were round his throat, the great cat's fangs were closed and locked behind his ears, ere he was aware of her approach.

In a moment the night was hideous with snarls and suffocated, strangling noises. The hyena rolled on his back, whereupon Chui got to work with his terrible hind feet. The fight might have lasted twenty minutes, for though the leopard had obtained the master grip, a hyena does not die easily. Somehow his strong neck had worked round, and he had the leopard by a forepaw. There was a nasty crunching noise, for the jaws of a hyena can crush the joint-bones of a horse. That leopard was doomed, and so was the spotted dog, but they must fight it out now.

They did not fight it out, because Simba came silently back, and saw, and understood. Each was tightly gripped in the death-hold of the other, and it was to be a long and painful business. So Simba went up and stretched them quivering where they lay, and because cat flesh is preferable to dog flesh, he fed at last.

Such a night in the wilderness when hunger reigns—rarely in the African Wilds, save in the wake of the Fire Fiend, when the mighty must rise against the mighty, or die.

The old moon peered down—the same old moon as we see from our firesides, and look upon as we part the curtains, happy that our children are sleeping safely in their world of tenderness and care. And to-morrow we go to the City in our world of wheels, till it seems that in our sheltered lives such things as these cannot be. Are they only the dreams of those who write?—but no, they are real! Out there that world goes on, while our roses grow in our gardens, to scent our rooms, which bear no taint of the eternal struggle, a life for a life, in the world as God made it.

Yet it is the same old moon! What scenes she must have looked upon, what dramas, what horrors, yet withal what scenes of gentleness among those who kill! From Alaska to the Gulf, throughout

the Dark Continent, and the Lands of Mystery, it is the same old moon. From the wisp of a Kanaka love-song to the roar of Simba; from the sigh of Safaid, of the snowy heights, to the song of the nightingale in our quiet glades—it is ever the same old moon!

Sometimes the mind shudders at the bigness of the world. It is depressing and terrible and unbelievable in its vastness—the drifting icebergs, the jungle, the eternal ranges; the sea, and ever beyond more sea, where strange things move into the light, and still stranger things lurk and swirl in the murky depths, about which man knows nothing, and therefore cannot believe! I try to close my mind to the vastness of what God has made, its awfulness, while mindful of its beauty, but ever the same dreams flicker and fall, and I see in the moonlight Simba the Terrible, who ruled the world when it was young.

Old Kiboko cared nothing for the world without. She belonged to the green and murky depths, the insect terrors of which could



*Old Kiboko cared nothing
for the world without*

not penetrate her hide. Forest fire, the civil war of the Mighty, did not disturb her mind, which was ever asleep in the moment, without regret for yesterday or scheme for to-morrow. All day she lay with her calf in the still lagoons, which the sun could not penetrate. Sometimes she basked on the surface, but if the glare or the heat disturbed her peace, she would go down for a time and cool off. She could feed down there in the green darkness, and was almost as much at home below the surface as a whale. Thirty minutes was perhaps her allotted span without air, but her calf could not hold out that time. When they were below together he would suddenly return to her, and stand on her back. That was her signal to rise, and up she would go till the nostrils of the calf were above the surface. His place was on her back, so that he was always the last to submerge and the first to break surface.

Then, at night-time, Kiboko would swim into the shallower water, and eat long tunnels through the reeds. These tunnels were dark and sheltered, but as she waded farther ashore, walking now on the bottom, the tunnels naturally increased in height. They ran in all directions from the lagoon, and always the calf was with her, sometimes on her back, sometimes behind her, according to her mood. From the main tunnels ran side tunnels, branching off in all directions, but at any moment she could crash back to deep water if she chose.

Old Leather Back, the crocodile, was her friend. Unwittingly, of course, for he had no sentiments of friendship towards anyone. He was her friend because he kept Simba out of the water. The lions would not have hesitated to attack the hippo calf, but it would have cost them their lives. If they had attacked him in the water the scent of blood would have brought the crocs swarming to the surface, and they would have got Simba, or anything else that moved. A croc stops at nothing, not because he is brave as we know bravery, but because he is brainlessly ferocious. When there is blood in the water, crocs will attack anything that moves.

That night old Kiboko, careless, perhaps, by long immunity from her foes, extended one of her tunnels farther from the water than was usual, till she and her calf were on dry land, though the rushes rose elephant-high overhead, shutting out the moonlight.

Here the greenery grew sweeter and more satisfying than in the liquid mud, and her calf and she were mowing their way through it like two steam navvies in soft sand.

Then suddenly there was a crash and a roar at Kiboko's heels. A pride of lions, numbering eight or nine, which had been sniffing and listening, bore down upon her calf, crushing and crippling him in their assault. An awful cry rose from his throat, half roar, half scream. "Mother! Mother!" it meant. It stabbed the moonlight vistas as a sound any man would have known—the cry of a young thing! It was immense and nerve-shattering, yet clearly the cry of one who called to another for help.

It stabbed deeper to the heart of the mother hippo. Peace-loving and peace-seeking she may have been, yet in defence of her young she was utterly fearless.

She knew that her calf was doomed—already down and out. She knew that she could not save or help him, but that made no difference.

She turned and charged down among them, trampling her own calf into the quagmire, her great head swinging from side to side, her mouth wide open, her yellow tusks exposed. But the lions were too quick for her. They ripped her flanks, they bounded on to her shoulders with fangs and claws at work, but foot by foot she was taking them, driving them, towards the edge of deep water.

It was not pleasant to contemplate, that closing scene. The lions were all round and all over her like weasels mad with blood lust. They were on her face, her ears, her hindquarters, clinging to her legs, tearing and worrying, while the hot blood streamed, and the awful sounds of worrying rang across the veldt. Another twenty yards and she could not have made it, but she had made enough to suit her purpose. Sideways on she rolled, exposing the pink of her belly to the moonlight, then down into the depths of murky, liquid slush which even she could not bottom, and she took her clinging foes with her.

There are others who can lurk and sniff and watch, beside the so-called King of Beasts. The scent of blood was in the air, and now the swirling waters were tinted red. The hippo sank, and with her those who had slain her young—down into the tangled, clinging



*The lions were all round
and all over Kiboko*

weed, where the water was heavy with heat-created slime about the stagnant edges. They sank and disappeared from view, but soon the killers were up again, fighting their way to the edge.

But they counted without the mother hippo. She rose, and her huge jaws chopped them while they swam. She reared up and beat them down and drove them farther into the deep, for the lagoon was her habitat, while *they* could merely strive to fight their way shorewards.

There was a crash as a great horned tail rose from the surface and came down on a struggling, coughing lion, casting a cloud of spray into the moonlight, and stretching him rigid where he swam. Then all round came swirl after swirl, and sinister ripples closing in, for the scent of blood is the scent of death. The hippo did not rise again, and for a long time the surface was alive with hideous, writhing forms, and when finally it was left to the sword-play of the moonlight, there was no sound save the crunching of bones from where the baby hippo lay.

The moon burned with an intensity like that of the sun over those malaria-ridden waters. A thin mist hung in streaks here and there, but only the insects broke the mirror-like surface beneath

which so many horrors dwelt. In the silver glare which almost hurt the eyes, one could see for miles along the Heeas River and across it too, for in this region it was an unending wilderness of lagoons and sloughs. Yet in all its vastness, nothing broke the mirror sheets save the insects dancing everywhere.

Moreover, there was silence—at last! Not the cry of a swamp bird, not the jibbering of a monkey, not the yell of a jackal, nothing save now and then a subdued clicking noise, which an experienced ear would have known was a hyena feeding.

It is strange how sometimes the wild folk act as though at a given signal. The birds of passage leave with one accord. The mountain slopes are alive with Alpine hares, then in an hour they are gone. It would seem that, under given conditions, they all hang on till the last moment, then simultaneously they decide to go.

The lions left that night, and peace settled again upon the swamp. The crocs were left to fare upon the multitudinous carrion for ever drifting into the lagoons, sufficient for their numbers, and their numbers are sufficient. Had the land-hunting continued they would merely have swarmed, more and more, to that part of the river. They would have bred and multiplied till the waters were thick with them, lying one upon another, with glassy eyes peering upwards.

But the lions left that night. Most of the leopards were already gone, and there were few left but the lions, which now must either go or share the fate of the Kilkenny cats. They went!

It was a mystery to many *where* they went in view of the vast area of the fire-belt, but the natives will tell you. They will tell you how every water-hole was strewn with the hulks of the dead and dying—those with cloven hoofs and those with single toes, and those with clawed paws. Deer, gazelles, antelopes, zebras, hyenas, jackals, even lions. The latter fed upon the carrion masses, till water failed them, and they could not compete with the vultures. It was a story of nature's remorseless wastage, if wastage it can be called—this process which has prevented the wilderness from becoming overstocked, throughout the countless ages which have stocked it. Thus

in the swarming horde there are many who can only just retain their footing when left to fight out their own salvation against their natural foes. When man steps in to take his toll they must inevitably go.

But such great sortings and shiftings occur only in the wake of flood, famine, and the Fire Fiend.

Chui—The Monkey-killer

AS yet the day had scarcely begun, but the tropical bush was already creeping with the children of the sunlight hours. Down in the shadows where Chui crept, a shadow among the shadows, there was as yet no light at all, but the world of the tree-tops where the parrots screamed was already radiantly beautiful as the first sunbeams touched the spires of the tallest trees. Thus, here and there, they shone in brightest colours, some twinkling gold, others crimson, for the dry season was far spent, and between these twinkling heights were the ravines and aisles of the forest roofs, green and purple and majestic. Southwards the panorama, as the parrots saw it, stretched—forest, eternal forests, trees of ethereal shapes with mighty, trailing vines, but to the north were dark, bare hills, a rocky wilderness, climbing upwards into the sky.

But it was not the parrots to which Chui was listening, though truly his bright amber eyes were searching the upper branches. Around him the earth was strewn with dead timber, lying criss-cross at every angle, and could one have seen Chui as he leapt soundlessly from log to log, one would have been impressed by his beauty and lissom grace. Under that silken coat his muscles glided and rippled, while every pose he took was one of sculptured ease, but—oh, how fierce and cruel, looking up, peering through the tangle of branches stretched like an elephant net above! Chui could not see the monkeys, but he could hear them—a constant subdued chattering and bird-like notes, punctuated by whistling cries which might have come from the feathered kind. As a matter of fact, Chui did not want to see them, for monkeys are quick in looking down, and to see might mean being seen. He was satisfied to know where they were, for they were moving, and Chui was following.

It could mean only one thing, for over there, where the monkeys were heading, flowed the river. It meant that they were going to drink, for there was little dew in the forest at this season, and this was their drinking hour. Chui followed.

Slowly the light improved, not only by reason of the creeping dawn, but because, just ahead, the shadows were less dense. It was the river, and his ears trained upon the sounds above, Chui crept to the edge of it, and peered out through the criss-cross of logs. The dark and oily waters glided by, glimmering in patches between the massive undergrowth which overhung them—not a sound anywhere now, save that constant chattering and chirping in the pale gold sunshine above.

But Chui knew the ways of monkeys. They might come fearlessly down at once and begin to drink, or this might prove one of their wary mornings. If so, they could follow down the river a mile or more to some point where the water narrowed and the trees met overhead. There they would cross and drink from the opposite bank, fooling any who had followed. Chui, the monkey killer, had to hunt hard for his living, hunt at all hours, and no man knew so much about the ways of wild monkeys as Chui.

But no!—luck was with him. An old man monkey came down, and with tail arched proceeded to walk along a mighty limb which overhung the river some twenty yards away. Chui's eyes glistened, his muscles rippled, his tail twitched from side to side, for the branch stood alone—no other branches above or on either side. Truly no creature can be more wary than an old man monkey, but catch him off his guard, and he can be the biggest fool.

Midway along the branch the old chap sat for a luxurious scratch, peeking



Chui crept, a shadow among the shadows

up at his troop mates, who were descending to join him. They came—old mothers and young, young men and adolescents, huddling round the old male, some with their arms round each other, others squabbling half-heartedly. They seemed still to be drowsy, for they yawned constantly, showing their strong yellow teeth, then the old man walked farther out to where the branch hung lower over the surface, and there followed a pretty scene. Within a minute every monkey was drinking, hanging on to branch or leaf, and dipping down to the surface with the other paw. It was all very dainty and graceful, and one could see the jewels of water sparkling from their fingers, but ever they were watching the water, ready to dart back should a shadow appear beneath them.

Then Chui slid into action. With never a sound he glided across the intervening space and gained the branch. So smooth were his movements that he did not appear to move fast, yet he was there before the nearest monkey had time to turn its head. In a second he was on the branch, and he had them marooned!

An awful chattering scream went up and sped from one to the next of the little tree-folk. "Chui!" it meant. "Chui, the spotted death!" Then silence again.

There was Chui, the spotted terror, looking at them with lowered brows, Chui quite still, for he had them at his mercy, and there was no hurry to strike. Better, indeed, to wait, for Fate plays her cards in strange ways. In that fraction of time something had happened—another grim actor had entered the scene. The monkeys felt its presence, knew that it was there, though their eyes were on Chui. It had risen to the surface beneath them just as Chui made himself known—a dark, swirling something, then another and yet another, till the whole water below was alive with them.

The old man monkey understood. He must act now or never. He could feel his clansmen pressed against him, quickly freezing into helplessness. Someone must pay the price for this, and he was their leader. I like to think of what that old man monkey did, for he must have thought it out.

If they jumped down and swam, they would have to swim to the other side, for Chui would get them if they landed this. None of them would reach the other side, so they must face Chui. He

could not kill them all. Some were bound to get by, and they must make the dash.

He, the old warrior, faced it unwaveringly. He deliberately sold his life, for he leapt straight at Chui's face, fangs exposed, feeble fingers clutching.

Of course he never reached Chui's face, for a padded paw, armed with crooked claws, met him and clutched him. Chui evidently meant to pin him down against the branch, and hold him there, but for once that skilled and lightning paw failed by the narrowest margin. It did not pin the old man monkey, though it broke him instantly. Somehow he dropped half under the branch, instead of on top of it, as Chui had meant, and in an instant Chui had to take both paws to hold him there. Simultaneously there was a striking, scuttling mob of monkeys all about the leopard's ears. They leapt over him and on to him. One little fellow actually alighted on his scalp, and made its teeth meet through Chui's ear. Up went the leopard's paw, but he was a fraction too late, and down went the old warrior into the water.

In an instant he was seized. There was just an oily swirl, then a mighty upheaval of swirls, and Chui kept his tail-tip up, still grabbing the empty air about his ears. He was just in time to see the monkeys departing, and—my goodness, how they departed! They departed by the thinner branches, veritably from leaf to leaf, by ways no leopard would try to follow, and all up and down the river the alarm-note ran, from tree-top to tree-top, the chattering alarm of monkeys coming down to drink or returning; in a moment the forest seemed alive with monkeys.

"Chui!" they cried. "Chui is here," and that was the end of Chui's hunting. He must go breakfastless, or, at any rate, he must creep away from this part of the forest. He must creep fearfully from cover to cover like an ignominious thief—he, Chui the Mighty, and that was what riled him! He could be angry if he liked. He could make the forest quiver with his rage, but it would avail him nothing. Better to acknowledge defeat and creep away, and Chui, who was wise, crept away.

He went down the river and stole across at the only crossing, daintily picking his pawhold, but of course he was seen. The



*Chui and Ma-Hoo lay in the soft
light, at peace with the world*

monkeys were watching and waiting—an inconceivable swarm of monkeys, advertising his whereabouts, swarming to the point where he was, jibbering at him from the branches, where the bright and floppy-winged fowls of the air joined them, till the din was hideous. Chui stole silently on. He was furiously angry, but it was useless to attempt self-concealment. The wee furtive things of the brushwood told the monkeys where he was, the monkeys told the parrots, and all were peering downwards for the sleek and silken form of Mr. Spots. And should one of the thousand watchers see so much as a tail-tip, the din began all over again.

When a hunter is spotted thus, his best plan is to go right away as speedily as he can, or to go to sleep where he is. Chui had no idea of going to sleep, because he was lacking his breakfast; therefore he went right away, and probably no creature on earth can travel more swiftly through dense bush than a leopard. Chui soon left the monkeys behind. Then he left the parrots behind. He was alone and silence reigned, save for the chattering far behind him.

It was daylight now. The tree-tops were aflood with gold, though the earth was still in shadow. Just ahead, here, the fertile forests ceased. There was a stony slope, treeless and covered with boulders. It was what is commonly known to us as a kopje, and Chui took to the open. One saw then as he mounted into the slanting light how marvellously camouflaged he was. Rather one did *not* see. Chui was there, but one did not see him as he crept from shadow to shadow, sand-coloured, rock-coloured, sun-coloured, and withal so silken in his movements that he moved as the shadows slide.

But there are eyes trained to see the invisible, nostrils true as the compass-point where danger is concerned. "There! Down there!" the quivering nostrils tell their owners, and if a shadow slides, the game is up.

From the rocky slope above there sounded a savage, dog-like bark, then in an instant the din became general. One could see them peering over the ledges—monkeys, large monkeys with dog-like faces, and many of them. Evidently the big rock monkeys had heard the din from the forest below, and their outposts and pickets were ready, waiting. Chui flattened where he was, yet he knew his luck was out.

Another minute and the rocks above were creeping with baboons. The whole village had turned out, and ever the company grew as more and yet more of them hastened round the slope, barking and "woffing," and all gazing down at where Chui was flattened.

Had Chui been any but a royal hunter he would have crept away, rather than spoil his hunting for another day, but it would seem that those who are most terrible delight in striking terror into the hearts of those whom they hunt. There was now no chance of a breakfast here, and, indeed, it would have been folly for even a leopard to strike when the whole army was assembled. To swoop

down on a single baboon and bear him off ere the rest can rally, would have been a very different matter, but now the S O S of one of them, had Chui laid claw upon him, would have brought the whole baboon village about his ears, for they are valiant fighters.

Yet Chui was angry, and in no mood to be jeered at by the hairy cave-dwellers. His social standing and theirs were two very different things, and he had to remind them of it. So, above the cries of the discordant rabble, there sounded a roar so fierce and threatening that silence fell instantly, and forth from his hiding into the sunlight Chui moved—the spotted nightmare of a monkey's dreams!

Instantly the din began again, the baboons leaping from rock to rock, showing their terrible teeth, jibbering their rage and hatred, but Chui, with head hung low, his amber eyes aflame, went on towards them. At first they stood their ground, threatening, full of defiance, but to face and meet Chui was beyond their final courage. As he approached they surged before him, yelling over their shoulders as they ambled on, slowly closing behind him, till they were on every side, terrifying in their fury, yet Chui would not even look at them. Muttering darkly, his nose to the ground, high in the shoulders, his long tail swishing angrily, he proceeded steadily through their midst, through the heart of their village, then swiftly down the other side and into the forest again, leaving them still jibbering behind him, though thankful that he was gone. And possibly Chui, too, was glad to reach quieter surroundings, to have retained his standing as one of princely blood who would go where he willed—and did!

But Chui of late had been more than ordinarily restless, more than ordinarily reckless in his hunting. In truth, the wanderlust was upon him, and that, the world over, is the mating instinct. So he left behind him the wide delta of fertile forests and took to the open hills. There were patches of jungle here and there, deep and rocky ravines, where the living trees fought for light through a decaying disorder of their own dead. There were naked slopes of rock in the crevices of which death lay coiled, fork-tongued and ready to strike, and there were deeply trodden game paths down to the drinking places, where eyes were ever watchful for foe or prey.

The wild folk are quick to divine each other's purposes, and those who saw Chui knew that he was not hunting. This was not his hunting range, and he was here for another purpose. The little hill zebras cocked their ears and swished their tails, having moved aside to let him pass. The eland stood as though carved in stone, and watched. The smaller gazelles just bunched together and trotted off, for ever switching their tails, and the wild



dog uttered a single yap as he whisked back into the rocks. Thus one clear mountain morning we might have seen Chui stretched full length on a boulder of rock, enjoying the early sunbeams. At the foot of the rock lay one of his kind, beautiful and perfect as he was, and every now and then Chui reached down with one paw and playfully patted her ears. At this she would yawn lazily up at him, showing the white of her chin, or rolling on her back she would paw the air playfully, while they conversed in low rumbles. It was pleasant to see these mighty creatures so much at peace, to contemplate this gentler scene of their lives as they lay in the soft light, at peace with the world, and with each other.

Yet Chui had not found the winning of Ma-Hoo a particularly peaceful matter. At first she had savagely rejected him. She had turned upon him tooth and claw, but Chui had insisted. He had followed at her heels, and not wanting to hunt himself, had effectively spoiled her hunting. So, in due course, she had sheathed her claws when she struck at him, and becoming used to his company, she had eventually made up her mind to endure him as one of the inevitable hindrances in life. Thus they had mated, haunting this one patch of the mighty slope, for there was shade here and water and open sunning places, such as the great cats love.

Needless to say, they had the corner to themselves, for there had been a good deal of noise attached to their courtship, and the days had gone by peaceably. They had hunted such small game

as could easily be caught, a mouthful here and there, glad for a time to be quit of bloodier hunting, but it is to be feared that these arcadian conditions were drawing to a close. How long would Chui and Ma-Hoo remain united? Not for long as an affectionate couple, I fear, for, unlike the dogs, that is not the way of the wild cats. Soon they would separate. Soon Ma-Hoo would drive him off, for this was her range. He might return to the country he knew, losing sight of Ma-Hoo till after her cubs were born; or, again, he might hunt the range next to her, ready to defend her and her cubs should



*In a moment the baboons
were all over Chui*

the need arise. This much was certain, that when their honeymoon was ended, she would see little or nothing of him till after the cubs were born. Yet he might be there.

Ma-Hoo was not a monkey-killer. One judges that she was older than Chui, for she chose heavier and more formidable game. So, when they were playing together—and for lightning quickness of movement those games of theirs passed all belief—Chui, when the chase became too hot, would leap into the timber and jump from branch to branch, till high overhead he would stand and peer down at her, his tail-tip switching. Ma-Hoo rarely followed him into the branches, but, on the other hand, she would bound up a cliff face where there seemed hardly foothold for a mouse, and it was wonderful to see her looping the loop on a vertical face of rock. Up the cliff side she would go, fifteen feet in a bound or two, then to left or right and down, to leap over Chui and loop the loop again. For, while Chui was a forest hunter, she was a mountain hunter, for the leopards the world over are the children of environment. Their range is great and varied.

So the time came when Ma-Hoo was ready to hunt again, and Chui, uninvited, followed. By narrow, rugged ways he followed, up shifting screes and by giddy shelves, where there was no scent or sign of game, no squeal of monkeys or barking of baboons, till they emerged in the first pale dawn over the cliff edge. Below them, on the other side, was a patch of open country, surrounded by green timber—a little oasis in the heart of the wilderness, and clearly some creature had been at work there. There were crops, all planted in little squares, a square and regular stockade, which never grew of its own accord, though Nature had done her best to hide it; and there were animals, too, for one could scent them. As yet there was no light for human eyes to see, but the leopards could make out every detail of the tiny human village, perilously poised, it seemed, on the almost vertical rocky face.

Ma-Hoo was all a-quiver with excitement, for already the east was brightening, and the dawn would be brief. She began to prowl, flattened, towards the north end of the village, but Chui hesitated, because of a strange new scent upon the air. He was ever suspicious of strange scents till he had tracked them down and found them

out, and this scent was particularly strange. It was, in fact, a mixture of scents mingled into one scent—the scent which issued from the doors of a native village, where men fed and slept and had their being, and it was the man scent which bade Chui pause. There was something ominous and warning about it—a dread something, arising from what may have been a leopard's dreams, for it was, indeed, an inherited memory; then Chui saw Ma-Hoo creeping on, flattened down, the hunting fire in her eyes, and he too was hungry. So he too flattened and crept to the south, so that they would have the trail between them, so that they could drive the game from one to the other, seize what you could, then away again as one raids a baboon village.

Yet Chui was ill at ease. He did not normally suffer from nerves, but he was deadly suspicious of this kind of hunting. He had never seen a human, never before scented one, and it was all so strange. He came to a human pathway. At the top of it was a well, and a stone vessel containing water. He lapped the water, despite the human taint which clung to it strongly. Then he went on down the pathway, which soon took him to the cliff face, down which it ran. The human dens, each with its scrap of ground, faced on to the pathway, which was just wide enough for a narrow cart, with empty space on the right. And once as he crept Chui saw Ma-Hoo above him and looking down on to the village from the other side. This gave him confidence.

Then there came to Chui another scent, more familiar and strongly enticing, for it was the scent of goat, of many goats, actually overpowering the scent of man. It came from lower down the pathway, where the goats were tethered behind the spiked stockade—all save one. That one was tethered outside the stockade alongside the path, half hidden by a castor-oil plant, out of sight of the way by which Chui came, and woe betide any spotted cat which came this way, for Ma-Hoo was no stranger there!

Thus Chui, as he crept up, was mindful only of the main herd, behind the stockade, and the little one under the castor-oil plant escaped him as it cowered back in terror. But a goat is a goat, and as the sinister spotted form came gliding round the corner, close to the edge to increase his run for the final leap, out shot a little



Ma-Hoo watched the fate of Chui

battering ram with dagger, upright horns, which smote Chui under the chin ere he could raise a paw to strike.

Thus, for the first time in his life, perhaps, Chui was caught off his guard, and perhaps the fact that his nerves were all on edge had something to do with it. But that goat was brave, and save for the rope which held it they would have departed over the edge together. As it was, Chui went alone!

Yes, alone. He had swerved aside as the little billy hit him, heedless of the giddy space below, and a hideous snarl shook the dawn air as for a moment he clung to the brink. Then he turned and leapt—he had to leap, or fall, and even as he went the sound of bells and gongs and human voices came from the shelf above.

Maybe Ma-Hoo, accustomed to the cliffs, would have fared better, but even for a mountain leopard a fall of over a hundred feet, with scarcely a clawhold on the way, is no light matter. Chui landed heavily, one would have thought never to rise, though probably not more than three or four of his nine lives were gone. He picked himself up, dazed and a little angry. There seemed to be something amiss with his spine, for his hind legs were not functioning just as they should. He crept off a little distance and went over his coat, but he was in no mood to dally, because of the noise which came from the village above. When he went on again he was furiously angry—in fact, in a mood to fight fire; angry with pain and humiliation, and perhaps because he was defeated—finally defeated! For Chui, the despot, the bully, had been driven down and out and over the edge by a feeble goat kid!

At all events he was going home. Home to his own range, to his own den in the heart of it, and here, already, he was on familiar territory, for he and Ma-Hoo had circled round by the high country, and, as luck would have it, Chui had actually fallen into his own

valley. There was a tingling, numbing pain in his jaws where the little dagger horns of the goat had struck him. He wanted water, and there was water over the hill there, on the way by which he had come on his search for Ma-Hoo. He heard the bark of a baboon, but he simply snarled a savage answer. Chui in his present mood was not to be turned aside, so he bore on as before, snarling his terrible menace, on and over the baboons' kopje, till again they were gathered round him, many baboons making the hillside hideous with their black forms and their barks and yells of savage resentment.

The wild folk are quick to judge each other, and there was something wrong with Chui this morning. His eyes were glazed, and his hind legs did not seem to be following properly, and—suddenly terrible jaws closed upon his neck in a vice-like grip of command. "Wait!" was the command. "You have come this way too often, Chui, and you have no right here. You were a fool to come this morning."

The old baboon died, but where one baboon leads the others follow. In a moment they were all over Chui, and it was not pretty to look upon. Yes, he had been a heedless fool to go that way this morning, for in the veldt, in the jungle, in the bush, in the forest, over plain and mountain, the world over, there is one ancient law which, sooner or later, in one way or another, is bound to be fulfilled. Upon it the whole balance of Nature is hinged, so that the mighty cannot annihilate the weak, while the feeble still survive to keep their places.

Peering down from a ridge high above, with cold yellow eyes, and behind them a cold, cruel soul, which could know no love save for those whom shortly she would feed at her breast, Ma-Hoo watched the fate of Chui, and little thought that such would have been her lot had she been alone that night. Not by the baboons, but by a way more lingering and terrible, for the venom of snakes, the poison of insects, could be no more certain than the death with which those little dagger horns were smeared.

Wallah-Umph's Tiger

"There is a tiger on this island!" said Wallah-Umph, but his friends refused to take it seriously—till they had to!

THE sun was gone, and darkness was creeping swiftly upon the jungle. Everywhere in the dense entanglement of palm and vine and fern were the eyes of monkeys, peering down at something which moved below, and now and then their dark silhouettes could be seen against the cloudless sky. They jabbered ceaselessly, but the one who moved below paid little heed to them, save that now and then she glanced up and bared her fangs in an evil, silent snarl. She was not at the moment hunting, or she would have crept away and hidden till they forgot her. She was on her way to the drinking pool to slake her thirst.

With the going of the sun, other sounds of the night were creeping in on every side—the high-pitched voices of the bats and the flying foxes, which belonged to the air above. One could hear the fan-like flutter of their wings, and now and then a beating of the leaves as they left their daytime hanging places and sought the air. Then there was the croaking of the frogs in the damp and murky corners, for the rainy season was just ended—just a frog here and there, then the murmur grew till the thickets were alive with it. Soon, when the daylight was gone, and the mist streaks gathered, the sounds of the monkeys would cease, but as yet it was neither daytime nor night. It was no one's hour, which is every one's hour.

Suddenly Bagh, the tigress, forgot the jabbering monkeys and froze in her tracks. Her attitude was that of tense and alert preparedness, so characteristic of the cats. She froze with one paw raised, her ears up, then slowly, imperceptibly, her hindquarters sank an inch or two, her tail-tip switched from side to side, her eyes narrowed.

Through the undergrowth, just ahead, was the drinking pool,

its surface radiantly clear and sharp as the last daylight fell upon it. A few yards out from the margin stood an old buck sambur, drinking serenely. He paid no heed to the warning chatter of the monkeys, for so far as he knew, he had no enemies in that land, save the human hunters, and of recent years they had left him alone. This was because he was old, and his head was not worth taking. It was also because he was about the last of his line, for big game had gone from the island with the establishment of the white man. For sentimental reasons they had spared him, king of the last remaining strips of jungle, but of late the old sambur had fallen into evil ways, as an old deer often does. He had taken to raiding the native plantings, deliberately getting into mischief. Lee's coolies had complained of his depredations, and Lee himself had seen signs of the mischief on his own estate. The old buck must go, and that was why Lee was waiting at the pool that night—waiting at that precise moment for the buck to emerge from the shadows on the other side, and cross the pool into the light. For Lee's aim was

*Bagh, the tigress, froze
in her tracks*



not too steady, and he had forgotten the question of light when an hour ago he took his station.

But he had not long to wait. Suddenly the old buck threw up his head, then wheeled, and the spray fairly flew as he came headlong across the pool, uttering a hoarse bark of terror and surprise. Simultaneously there was a roar which shook the very air, and behind the sambur, headlong across the pool in mighty bounds, came Bagh, the tigress.

In the failing light Lee could hardly see her for the clouds of spray, yet he could not be mistaken. He let off his rifle, but whether at the sambur or the tiger he did not know. He was too unnerved and shaken to be sure of anything, and the bullet went wide, which was perhaps as well. There sounded a coughing snarl from the jungle not thirty yards away, and Lee packed up and went home.

Fortunately he had not far to go, for the pool stood at the edge of his plantation. They had cleared the jungle almost to the edge of it, so that he had merely to dive through a few yards of shadows, and he was on his own open ground.

Safely in his own bungalow, he helped himself to a stiff whisky and soda, and thought it out. It seemed incredible, yet there could be no doubt in his own mind as to what he had seen, and the question now was—what to do next? If he spread the alarm, half his coolies would desert, and this was his busy season. So Lee decided to take his old car with the first streak of daylight and run down to Biddaharay to ask the advice of his friends, and perhaps obtain their help.

Lee arrived at the Constitutional Club in good time, and when Commander Wills drifted in he was feeling slightly recovered from a sleepless night.

"Halloa, old Wallah-Umph!" the Commander greeted him. "Have a stinger?"

"I've had four already," confessed Lee. "And, by gad, Commander, I needed them! I've slept never a wink, and my nerves are all to bits." His hands shook as he lit another cheroot, and he took the Commander to a corner, albeit they had the room to themselves. "Wills," he whispered. "There's a tiger on this island! I've seen it with my own eyes."

The officer regarded him sympathetically. "Where and when?" was his simple demand.

Lee told him. He explained just what had happened. When he had finished the Commander jerked the knees of his slacks and remained a moment thoughtful.

"Look here, Wallah-Umph," he began, "if I were you, I wouldn't say anything to anyone about this for a day or two, and meantime take things quietly. I'm not questioning what you saw, but at the same time it sounds a bit queer. There hasn't been a tiger on this island for the past twenty years. It would have to swim thirty miles to get here, and then from country which isn't tiger country!"

"Umph!" muttered the planter. "I'm telling you, Wills, what I *saw*! There isn't any doubt about it." His hands shook still more.

"I know—I know!" pursued the Commander quietly. "But the only thing you lack is corroborative evidence. That shouldn't be difficult to get, Wallah-Umph! I know a tiger's pug-marks when I see them. What about our going to the pool and taking a look round—just the two of us together?"

"Umph—that's all right," agreed Lee. "The only trouble is that there isn't an hour to be wasted. If he's there we've got to get him, and it isn't as though there's any doubt about it. I tell you, I saw him!"

The Commander sighed. "What d'you want to do, then?" he asked, and Lee had his answer prepared.

"Get together a party and hunt him out, of course—the sooner the better—umph?"

"Suit yourself," came the quiet response. "We'd better go into the billiard-room and see who's there, only goodness help you, Wallah-Umph, if we beat the jungle and there isn't any tiger!"

In the billiard-room a few old friends were idly knocking the balls about or discussing the topics of the day, and forthwith the conversation ran somewhat as follows:

"Wallah-Umph's seen a tiger!"

"Good old Wallah-Umph! Where?"

"On his own estate."

"Splendid. The air must be full of them some nights, isn't it, Wallah-Umph?"

"I tell you there's a tiger on this island," doggedly reasserted Wallah-Umph.

"It must be a dashed good swimmer," someone observed.

"Possibly he fell off a steamer," someone else suggested.

"Anyway, I saw him, so that's that!" affirmed Wallah-Umph.

"Apart from what I saw—if you'd heard what I heard last night, you wouldn't doubt what it was! Umph!" said Wallah-Umph.

"Look here, Wallah-Umph," observed a young naval officer. "No doubt you're right, but the gunboat was cruising round the island last night. She let off her siren somewhere up your way. I heard it myself."

A general laugh followed, for "pulling the leg" of Wallah-Umph was quite a recognized pastime at the Club.

"That's it—laugh at me!" cried Wallah-Umph. "Have your own bit of fun out of it! It will do nobody any harm, but you'll have to apologize when you find I'm right."

"But, Wallah-Umph, there isn't enough game on the island to support a tiger!" put in the same junior officer.

"There are plenty of monkeys!" said Wallah-Umph triumphantly. "Some nights the air's simply full of them!"

They admitted it was one up to Wallah-Umph.

"All the same, he'd soon get into mischief. He couldn't remain in hiding," argued Commander Wills.

"That's what I'm afraid of," stated Wallah-Umph. "He's bound to get into mischief. This island is no place for a tiger."

"There's not enough jungle to hide one!" someone else argued.

"Isn't there!" persisted the planter. "I've known a tiger hide for six months where you wouldn't have thought there was enough cover to hide a cat! Anyway, I know, and I'll tell you what we'll do! We'll have a grand drive to-morrow. I'll supply the grub and the drinks, and if we don't see a tiger, I'll foot the bill. If we do, or find his spoor, the party foots the bill. That on—umph?"

"I'm on!" said the Commander.

"So am I. We know there's an old sambur to pop off at in any case."



*The tigress came round
a boulder of rock on
top of him*

"What if the tiger eats Wallah-Umph?"

"Oh, probably one or two of us will accidentally fall into his grave during the burial stunt!" prophesied a previous critic.

"No," said Wallah-Umph, "if the tiger kills me, all I ask is that my pals have a jolly good funeral breakfast. No dashed sentiment about it! I'm off to make arrangements."

Although it cannot be pretended that the party which turned up next daybreak were in the mood to take the matter very seriously, it must be admitted that Wallah-Umph's preparations were superb, particularly the organization of the refreshment side. The most hopeful drive of the day was to start at the edge of the gardens, working junglewads, and including the drinking pool, and this was to be taken first. If they saw no tiger Wallah-Umph hoped, at any rate, to show them pug marks. Mechans had been hastily fixed in the trees, which rather puzzled the beaters. Every native in the locality was turning up, ostensibly to drive the old sambur, for which purpose the mechans seemed a little superfluous, though as Wallah-Umph explained to his head man, this was necessary for the sportsmen to obtain a better view.

As they took their places, it was observed on all sides that their host was dead sober. He issued instructions in a steady voice, ordering that no shot be fired on the first drive unless they saw the tiger. Resultantly one or two of the party now began to regard the matter a little more seriously. The majority of them had never seen a wild tiger in their lives, and what if there really were one? No man sets out on his first tiger-hunt without some kind of tremor of the nerves, though he may choose to call it "hunters' heart."

Safely on their mechans, however, things cheered up. Some distance off the beaters could be heard armed with their wonderful assortment of noise-creating weapons, which ranged from empty cans and bottles and hollow bamboos to home-made rattles and musical instruments. Small game of all kinds soon began to show, but the line of waiting sportsmen behaved admirably, except that one of them would sing, and another fell out of his tree. If they really bagged the tiger, there was certainly no telling what would happen before nightfall.

The beaters had scarcely been under way ten minutes, when Wallah-Umph let off his rifle. Wills, on his right, concluded that it must have gone off accidentally, till he was surprised to see his host climbing down from the mechan by its rattan rope.

"Hi! What are you doing, Wallah-Umph?" he demanded.

Wallah-Umph was standing at the foot of the tree, listening intently. "I've made a mistake, Wills," he said soberly. "A bad mistake. Keep me covered as long as you can, please!"

He was stooping forward in an alert attitude, his rifle ready. Wills was sure the man had gone mad.

"What on earth have you done?" he asked quietly.

Lee was now creeping stealthily towards a thicket near. "I've shot a tiger cub," he replied, still in the same strained voice. "It's lying dead in the thicket there—where I'm going."

Wills caught his breath, more than ever convinced that Wallah-Umph had departed off the deep end. "Get back into your tree, you ass!" he ordered. "Do you hear me, Lee? Get back at once!"

But Lee was groping steadily on. "I've shot her cub," he repeated. "Do you realize what that means?"

"Yes, you infernal idiot!" Wills bawled back. "It means that she'll get you, too, if you don't climb up."

"It means more than that," was Wallah-Umph's steady reply. "It means that she'll go back and dab the natives, one by one. I *know*, and it isn't a white man's game. I haven't even told them what we're hunting."

By now the news had fled from mechan to mechan that Wallah-Umph had shot a tiger cub, and the remarks were in accordance with the circumstances. It was suggested that he might have shot his grandmother or a native goat—anything, rather than a tiger cub. Wills alone was serious. "Come back, Wallah-Umph!" he cried. "Oh—in the name of——"

For Wills had heard something which he could not mistake. His rifle was ready, and if ever a man was prepared, he was! Wallah-Umph also was ready, yet he managed to turn with a whimsical smile.

"Wills," said he calmly, "there *is* a tiger on this island!"

Wills was the only man who saw it. He said that poor old

Wallah-Umph had no chance at all. She came round a boulder of rock on top of him, and hit him once ere he could bring up his rifle. Wills shot her dead, within twelve feet of the cub which old Wallah had drilled between the shoulders. Just a glimpse of stripes, of course, but admittedly a bad mistake!

When Wills stooped over him, Wallah-Umph was still alive. He seemed to think that some kind of joke had occurred.

"Don't forget that breakfast, you fellows," he said, and then, characteristically, he added: "Umph." He was too much of a gentleman to observe more.

They marked the place where Wallah had fallen with a stone. It was clumsily inscribed by the hands of his Club friends, because they felt he would have preferred that to native work. It read:

"Here Lies a Very Brave Pioneer,
who made no Enemies Save the Tigress that killed him."

"Well," said Commander Wills, when they were sauntering back from the funeral, "we've planted the dear old thing, and now what about that breakfast? We couldn't stomach it to-day, but it was his wish, you know!"

"I'm tired of pushing out the boat," observed another officer gloomily. "There's been too much of it of late. Had we all been sober, this might not have happened."

"Still," said Wills. "We've got to do something. It was old Wallah's wish."

"But there was something else he would have preferred, only he was too much of a gentleman to suggest it," replied the planter. "I knew Wallah-Umph pretty well. We've lived pretty well on each other's doorsteps and—his mother is still living!"

"Well?" questioned Wills.

"Oh, just something to send to her," replied the planter, "something commemorating the heroism of his death, and how on this island—he was—very dearly loved!"

Somehow funeral breakfasts never seem to come off.

